The DIVINE LADY

E. Barrington

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The DIVINE LADY

A Romance of
NELSON and EMMA HAMILTON

by

E.
BARRINGTON

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PREFACE

As I sat, years ago, in the Admiral's cabin of Nelson's flag-ship, the *Foudroyant*, the thought of this romance came to me, for this ship was the sea-shrine of that great but errant passion. She is a wreck now, her stranded ribs are green with weed, her bones are broken in the wash of the tide. A grave at sea amidst the answering thunder and flash of guns would have been a nobler ending.

But the story, with all its love, cruelty and heroism, remains alike beyond oblivion, condemnation or pardon. It is. It has its niche beside the other great passions which have moulded the world's history. For if Nelson knew himself when he declared that Emma was part and parcel of the fire breaking out of him, without her inspiration Trafalgar might not have been.

I have treated it imaginatively, yet have not, as I think, departed from the essential truth which I have sought in many famous biographies such as Mahan's, Sichel's, Laughton's and others.

Yet the best biographies of Emma are the lovely portraits Romney left of his Divine Lady, and of Nelson the best is the sea-cathedral, the *Victory*, at rest in the last home port he sailed from to his splendid doom. From these all the rest of the story might well be reconstructed.

E. Barrington
Canada

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PART I

THE DIVINE LADY

CHAPTER I

HOW GREVILLE MET HER

She sat by the window and sang, and as she sang the children on the green outside clustered under the elms in little groups to listen to the delicious voice, for she sang carelessly glad, like a thrush alone in a leafy bower. Clear resonant notes pouring from a pillared throat magnificently strung for its work and behind it a passionate vitality that sent the crystal stream welling from the hidden springs of the heart.

> Should he upbraid
> I'll own that he prevail,
> And sing as sweetly as the nightingale.
> Say that he frown, I'll say his looks I view
> As morning roses newly dipped in dew.

She trilled and rippled, and put her head aside to see the hat she was trimming with flowers, and paused to consider, and trilled again, and looped the chain of notes in the purest soprano half unconsciously, more occupied with the hat than with the song, and stopped—the hat became engrossing. A little head appeared at the window.

"Do it again, lady. 'Tis so pretty!"

Even that audience was not despicable. She put the

hat down, leaned her bare arms on the sill and put her heart into the singing. The woman in the next house thrust a sour face out at the window.

"You run along to your play, you brats! Wasting time listening to the like of that!" Then, as they helter-skeltered off, to herself: "That Mrs. Hart; any one to look at her can see what *she* is!"—and flung the window to. The song stopped abruptly. She turned in a fury as if to fling back defiance, then stopped, flushing scarlet, and stood stiff in the middle of the floor; the hat at her feet, the day spoilt for good and all.

" 'Tis a pitiful, wicked, brutal shame," she cried, "that do what I will, go where I will, I can never get rid of it. And 'tisn't as if 'twas my fault. If those misses yonder had had my upbringing, had lived as I did, slept where I did, they'd have done the same, I warrant, for all they step along so cool and genteel now." She flung out a tragic arm toward the window. Two young ladies, full-skirted, large-hatted, with muslin fichus, crossed discreetly over chaste bosoms in the mode of 1782, were pacing sedately over the pleasant green common, past the wall of the churchyard. Lest they should need a more stringent guard than their own modesty, a well-fed footman with full-blossomed calves followed them, his gilt-headed staff and the gold lace on his livery gleaming in June sunshine, his high-fed face turned with a furtive air towards the curtains that hid the fair fury. The young ladies themselves shot a veiled glance apiece under drooping brims in that direction, for there was much healthy curiosity afloat on and about Paddington Green concerning that modest establishment.

Who could be surprised there should be? Take a placid suburb near to and yet remote from the scandals of London, place about its drowsy green the small respectable houses of Edgware Row chiefly inhabited by faded spin-

sters and decorous widows living out their declining days under the guidance of the church bells, and in the one vacant house of this Row set suddenly a handsome youngish man whose studied simplicity of dress cannot hide his fashion and consequence, and a young girl so beautiful that in a country where beauty itself partakes of the nature of sin, she must at once be found guilty until proved innocent—and mark what happens.

Of course it happened. Emma made a few timid advances when first she was set up as housekeeper. She spoke to the next door Mrs. Armitage across the paling of the little garden, and offered a loaf of bread when that lady was loudly regretting that the baker had forgotten his call. It was refused with a thorny precision which conveyed that bread from such hands was poison. When little Jemmy Barrett fell and grazed his knees, she stanched the wounds, filled his hands with sugar biscuits and led the howling culprit tenderly to the Barrett home among its syringa bushes across the Green. The first suspicious glance of Mrs. Barrett supposed her guilty of the howls, and explanation only produced a frosty, "Very obliging in you, I'm sure. Jemmy, if you don't stop that noise—" and Emma, eyeing the child wistfully (for reasons), turned and walked away, followed by looks of greedy curiosity that drew heads from several windows. The clergyman's wife called, but did not repeat the visit. "My dear, I have discovered that the servant, the cook, is her own mother," cried the lady in the study of that divine, "and sure one knows what to think in such cases. Do pray make enquiry about Mr. Greville. 'Tis a name that bespeaks nobility, and the girl, for all her looks—"

Her looks! Here comes the difficulty, for how describe, how convey in any words, the beauty that nature bestows but once or twice in a century. There was not a great artist but later tried to give it living and glowing on his

canvas, and not one of them but would own that, his best done, there was still the Unattainable laughing or sighing forever beyond his reach. Perhaps that most unbishoplike prelate, the Bishop of Derry, summed her up best when he cried, "God was in a glorious mood when he made Emma"—and yet that too needs detail if you are at all to picture her fascinations. Item: two lips indifferent red, in Shakespeare's fashion? No, no, that may do for an Olivia but will not serve such a paragon as Emma. Let us essay the impossible and at least fall in good company, for all tried, and every man of them failed.

She was the perfect height, long-limbed, full-bosomed for a girl of her age, the hands and feet not delicate, and conveying the notion of physical strength and power as did also the fine throat and marble moulded arms. For her figure alone she was noticeable—it was to be seen slender, melting, flowing within her draperies, and every movement as full of ease as a cat's that need never stop to consider its swiftness or slow subsidence into a luxurious coil for sleep or blinking at the fire. Coming up behind this girl, you must needs take note of her grace, the slow turn of the head on the long throat, the rhythm of curving arms and pleading hands (for she had many and uncommon gestures), the lovely length from hip to heel. Her body spoke for her and promised abundantly for her face.

Indeed, she was a wave of the ocean of beauty tossed by the breeze of youth. Should she be described? See how Romney has given her as a Bacchante, arch chin turned over her shoulder, eyes and mirthful mouth laughing deliciously to each other and to the happy fauns supposed out of sight. She will lead the dance in the woods, and sit beneath the black shade dappled with moonlight, wooing and wooed, in the clasp of strong arms with a hot cheek pressed to hers. Yet again—Circe, grave with

a ruined passion, standing in noble height with down-pointing rod of enchantments, reversing her spell on her man-souled beasts; or a reading Magdalen, pensive, robed from head to knee in streaming auburn hair curling into gold at the tendrilled ends. Ah, but such hair as that, though it may be for Magdalens, is not for such as retire to caves and bury themselves in theology! Far otherwise.

Yet no picture of them all was as lovely as herself. The large limpid eyes of violet grey might be hinted on canvas, no more, and what artist could give that signature of a freakish planet—a brown spot swimming in the liquid deeps of one. She owned that she herself considered it an absurdity, but, veiled in delicious lashes, or flashed at you in glittering laughter, it won hearts. Her mouth was divine—the sweet upward curves, the full lower lip with its twin cherries—and even that was not its charm of charms, for the changing expressiveness of it was beauty's self, and after that point no man could any more inventorize, but was tangled hand and foot in the blue glance that netted him, the sweet smile that completed his ruin.

And hers—for what should be the fate of a girl like this born to a village blacksmith in an English village where dull days repeated dull days in everlasting sequence? Surely nature was ironic in locking such a bird in such a cage—a bird made for the wild woods and wild mating—a star dancing in the laughing dark. London beckoned the country lass along a road paved with hope and ignorance, and dropped her like ripe fruit hung on a stem too slender, into the mud, where the flies crowd and buzz over the crushed and muddied sweetness. For after a few half-hearted attempts at domestic service comes a darkness. Ugly rumours hang about it. Its implications were not perhaps quite clear to herself—but be it as it may, a girl of fifteen may plead for pity. Let us take

her own account of it to Romney, who befriended as well as immortalized her: "Oh, my dear friend, for a time I own, through distress, my virtue was vanquished, but my sense of virtue was not overcome."

Let us leave the darkness then and make no attempt to turn light upon the obscene figures that move through it about this child. She must have yearned, did yearn, for some position where the day could bring security and not violent and terrible change. Could one hope to find it in the arms of a King's officer of the Navy, a light-hearted fool who is the first clear figure in the patchwork pictures of her life?—a man, it must be said, with no eye for the amazing woman hid in the immature girl as the conquering Aphrodite sleeps in the rough block of marble. He saw her beautiful, as many Susans and Pollys please a sailor's fancy; snatched at the beauty and bruised it in the snatching, and passed on. So a black hoof may bruise the meadow-sweet, and tramp on knowing nothing. He found no more in this wonder than two months would exhaust, and sailed away to his destiny, leaving the way dimly open through many turns and obstacles to a mightier sailor than he who was to call the castaway "the most precious jewel that God ever sent on earth."

But the man bruised her—broke some sincerity, some wide-eyed trust in her soul that life could never restore. And again she was flung on her pitiful resources and again comes a hiatus which there is no accurate knowledge to fill.

Again she struggled for some security. Could it be found this time with a gay, fox-hunting, rollicking young squire of Sussex, easy alike in his cups and amours, Sir Harry Fetherstonehaugh?—"Fetherstone," his cup-companions called him. He needed a pretty "whoman," as poor Emma spelt it, to sit at his table when the company was not too drunk to appreciate feminine charm—and

was proud of her astonishing beauty much after the manner of King Ahasuerus, who also hoped to dazzle his sycophants and create envy by disclosing the charms of Queen Vashti at his banquets.

But Vashti proudly declined to be an exhibit, and so did not Emma. She did her best to please. She smiled, and could not tell for the life of her how to hit the mean between friendly reception and familiarity with these men who were equally ready to tally-ho with Sir Harry in the field, and make love to his lovely mistress after dinner. She shared their sport, riding with the best of them, wild bright hair streaming from her velvet cap as she galloped furiously over the swelling Sussex Downs with the blue sea below. Never a man could outride her; and not one of them but wondered at the brilliant beauty, the brilliant cheeks and eyes, the rushing vitality of this lovely creature Sir Harry had picked up, God knows where, to be the envy of half a county. She sat behind her tray of tea in the old drawing-room, where the ghostly crucifix is reflected from nowhere in a great mirror and none can tell how, and tried to put on the modest graces of a Lady Fetherstonehaugh when some bold arm was thrust about her waist, and must for all her efforts subside into the kitchen giggle and the scuffle and escape.

She did not, however, always escape, for Destiny, whom beauty must draw like a lover, was at her heels again with the ironic smile that is no lover's, God knows!

The Honourable Charles Greville, younger son of the Earl of Warwick, conferred his honourable company upon Sir Harry, merely for a shooting party—no long visit, for the brainlessness of these masculine gatherings had no attraction for him. One went, because in his world men shot or hunted and could not take their proper place in it if they did not, but it was impossible that a man of real attainments could please himself long in the com-

pany of a mere man of sport and fashion and his boon companions crowding foolishly about him.

Mr. Greville did not drink, save in a gentlemanly moderation. He shot in moderation; in moderation he hunted; and the amours of an uncelibate life were also in moderation, governed by a due regard to expenditure. But he was an amateur, a dilettante of beauty, for all that—beauty in woman, but still more in chaste Greek statuary, in noble Etruscan vases with figures dancing upon them in a long-dead joy; in strange crystals, coins, and all the fascinating stuff that Time picks up on the seashore of Eternity and drops from his pack as he goes on to the next adventure, forgetting the last. And not only for himself must he collect (and indeed could do little enough because of this limited income), but also for his uncle, Sir William Hamilton, who was Ambassador in Naples; a very distinguished virtuoso indeed and all but final authority on the art of Greece and Rome.

So, armed with all his well-born graces and a prudence beyond his years, Mr. Greville came down to Up Park, his latest sacrifice on the altar of fashion. There might be a pretty maid-servant to chuck under the chin; there would certainly be the glorious champagne of the air on the wild Downs, not to mention Sir Harry's cellars, and —Lord, he had forgotten that!—there would be Sir Harry's new mistress to ridicule when he returned to the clubs. The last had been a common enough little slut; indeed, a man of birth might well wonder how another might amuse himself with such poor company when ladies of family were by no means unapproachable and less costly in more ways than one if discreetly wooed.

Mr. Greville was never to forget, however, in the course of a long and virtuous life, how he first saw the new charmer.

When he arrived at Up Park, it was a gay autumn

afternoon, a light air crisping the dry leaves of the great copper beeches ere it tossed them to the earth, the late dahlias flaunting in the gardens, and the chrysanthemums in rows. Sir Harry was at the great hall-door with two grooms, both doing their utmost to control as magnificent a horse as Greville had ever clapt eyes on, a great bony bay thoroughbred, plunging and trembling, mad with nerves and spirits, quivering and sweating. A lady's saddle was on his back, and a girl in riding dress and feathered hat stood on the steps of the portico, watching him so keenly that she never noted Greville winding up the garden from the park. Sir Harry was swearing like a trooper. I spare my readers the greater part of his oaths, since they are out of fashion and therefore useless. One rests familiar, however.

"I tell you, Emily, you shall not. And what's more, I'm damned if I don't flog you instead of the horse if you attempt it. That beast must be broken—if they break every bone of him, before man or woman can master him. How dare you order him round, you damned hussy!—"

And so forth, and so forth, the grooms with an eye apiece on the horse and another on the lady. Greville stopped to watch the contest. Her face he could not see for she was sideways on to him, but the figure in her habit was pleasing.

Not a word did she say. She stood leaning against a pillar, watching.

"Take him away!" shouts Sir Harry, "and if you, damned etc., sons of etc., bring him round again before I tell you myself, I'll," again etc.

A flute-like voice from the lady: "Suppose you'd permitted me, Sir Harry, what would you have betted I couldn't master him?"

"Suppose I'd been fool enough to permit it, I'd have

bet you fifty guineas you'd be a broken heap of bones in five minutes, and serve you right!" growls Sir Harry, turning to lounge in. The grooms turned also, she still watching—a statue in marble repose. Then, a most astonishing thing. While they were yet but a few steps away, she flew down the steps like a lapwing, and, with the horse held as it was on either side, she got one hand on a groom's shoulder, the other on the pommel, made a wild scramble for the stirrup and was on his back before you could say Knife. She could not get her leg over the pommel in the hurry, but had her wits about her, her foot fast in the stirrup and a smart cut with her whip for either groom that sent them back smarting and swearing, and so off and away like a whirlwind—her right leg settled into safety at last, and Sir Harry stamping and screaming in the portico.

"Lord save us!" says Greville, and stopped dead to see the end of it.

She could not control the beast at first, and they tore madly over the flower-beds, cutting down the dahlias and wreaking ruin among the rose-bushes. The grass flew behind the pounding hoofs, the wild eyes shot flame, and the raging north wind might have been his sire, as he tossed the girl on his mighty back.

"The nymph and the centaur!" says Greville, watching coolly. "I'll back the nymph, however!"

He did right, though it was even betting as yet, and Sir Harry made matters the worse for her by running yelling down the wide path, the pale grooms at his heels. She did a little more work in the garden for which the gardeners would bless her next day and then she lifted him magnificently over against the great laurel hedge at the bottom. Would he give in to her? Not he, if he knew it! He swerved sharp, and all but tossed her into the green level on the top, then up the garden again.

Greville caught Sir Harry's arm: "You fool, you! Be still, or you'll kill the woman."

Down the garden they thundered once more, she riding gloriously, teeth clenched and wild hair flying, and put him at it again, and over, over like a bird in flight, not brushing the topmost leaf with flying hoof.

"Stand clear! I've got him!" she screamed, and so off and away in the park, where if she could stick on she could ride him silly, and so they lost sight of her, riding hell for leather.

The two gentlemen met in a condition that forbade formal welcome between host and guest.

"Did you see that—madwoman?" cries Sir Harry, his eyes glaring over purple cheeks.

"By the Lord, yes!" says Greville, even his cool blood beating fast. "And a finer sight I never saw—woman and horse alike."

"You'll see her brought home on a shutter as sure as I stand here. Go down the park, Bates, and be ready."

"I back the lady!" Greville turned and ran sharp for the paling above the ha-ha that commanded the park, Sir Harry pounding in the rear. "I back the horse!" he got out between his gasps, and fixed the bet at fifty guineas with what breath was left. Greville took him.

She grazed a chestnut and stooped her head on the beast's neck to avoid the sweeping branches, and Greville quaked for his guineas. They swept round the lake, and now she got her whip ready and cut him mercilessly till he went like the devil. She put him at the long steep slope and flogged him up it, and, to make a long story short, wit conquered wind and it was not too long before he knew he was beat. And still she did not spare him. Down the slope, but turned and up again, until he stopped dead, dropping his ears, running with sweat, a conquered brute.

So she let him stand awhile, herself now drooping on the saddle, languid from the fierce struggle, and there they stood like weariness itself on the green sward with the trees above him. At last, she turned him towards home and walked him very slowly back to where the two men were waiting.

It may be supposed Sir Harry was not in the best of tempers—a hundred guineas to pay for an afternoon's contradiction sweetens no man's blood—but he had found time to say the needful about Greville's visit before the wearied pair came up to them, and Greville time to think himself lucky his excitement had stood him fifty guineas to the good. He was curious to see the girl's face. Of course Sir Harry's oaths and the general course of events had taught him the lady's situation.

"Mrs. Hart, I conclude?" he questioned.

"The same, and a man deserves what he gets for saddling himself with a—. If he spent his whole substance on a jilt like that, he'd get nothing for his pains but ingratitude and worry to drive him mad."

"My dear sir, let us at least thank her for an exhibition of the finest tussle I ever saw between man and brute. You certainly have picked up a very uncommon companion, and I'm told all the world envies you her beauty."

That struck the right note. The cloud thinned somewhat on the proprietor's brow.

"Why, as to that, the girl's well enough," says Sir Harry grudgingly, "and I know a beauty as well as another. But I give you my word, sir, that that horse is manageable—I'll swear he is!—compared to Mrs. Hart. She'll have her way, she will. if she dies for it, and kicks up the devil's dust if she doesn't. A wife itself couldn't be more of a termagant. The least we may expect from a woman like that is submission, and I dare assure you—"

But here the culprit came up, slowly undulating with

the horse's tired walk, and looked Mr. Greville over, but took no heed of him.

The feathered hat was somewhere in the park; the sleeve of her habit torn half away by a ripping branch, and a breadth of the skirt hung like a lowered flag. But there was no flag lowered in her eyes, or the lift of her head, though her voice was as wooing as a ring dove's—soft, fluty, a most remarkable voice, as indeed everything about this young woman was remarkable.

"Oh, Sir Harry, forgive me, I entreat you. I believe 'twas the devil possessed me, but when I saw him going off I must needs tear after him if it cost me my soul alive. 'Tisn't the guineas. I wouldn't accept one of them if you threw them at me, but I had to win the bet. Oh, Sir Harry, don't be hard on me—you that's the finest horseman yourself in Sussex. You know what it is!"

She drooped toward him sweetly, her eyes caressing him.

"You wouldn't wish me to be a coward!" she said.

Her hair hung almost to the horse's fetlock as she stooped, all gold and gloss in the smooth auburn curves. Greville had never seen so long. She might ride like Godiva and be decent. Her eyes—were they violet, blue, or deepest grey? Her beauty amazed the man. It stung like strong drink.

"I'm so tired!" she said with a child's pout on exquisite lips. "Oh, help me down, Sir Harry."

"You got up, you can get down!" says Sir Harry, and slouched up the step, calling to Bates over his shoulder to take the brute round.

She looked at Greville, releasing her leg for the slide. He came forward without a word, but smiling, and she slid into his arms—a good weight he felt her—and so stood beside him on the steps.

"He's awful angry with me, isn't he?" she said with a

dipping sparkle in her eye and a jerk of her thumb over her shoulder. Her accent was village—he placed it somewhere Chester-way—but not unpleasing, as, indeed, what could be unpleasing in that voice? Her h's uncertain—that was the flaw. Short of Venus Aphrodite even divinest beauty must have its vulnerable spot, and the great ladies were to jeer at her for this later. But she dazzled the man for all the dropped letters.

"Awful!" he said, "yet I don't blame him, madam. You ran the risk of smashing the most beautiful thing in the world, and that thing his own peculiar treasure. For I imagine I address Mrs. Hart? The gentleman left us to our own introductions."

"The same!" says she, dropping a curtsey. "Well, but, sir, you saw yourself how 'twas! Now, the man I could admire would have took me in his arms and said, 'Emily, that was a sight and a fight I won't forget, and I wished all Sussex here to see it and cry Bravo!' "

"Madam, exactly what I myself felt!" says Mr. Greville sedately. "Shall I carry out the scene as you sketch it?"—and extended his arms.

She laughed like a very minx from between her hair, and ran up the steps. At the top her whole expression changed and, putting back her hair with her hands, she stood there tall in the long folds of cloth, and with a certain dignity about her.

"Sir, I would not have you suppose me always like this, and since I am hostess here, I ask your name and welcome you to Up Park."

He bowed profoundly to fall in with this new mood.

"Madam, your most obedient. My name is Greville, Charles Greville, a long-standing acquaintance of Sir Harry Fetherstonehaugh."

She curtseyed with propriety.

"Sir, the housekeeper will show you your usual chamber. Will you please enter?"

He did so, and saw the shining locks dim in the dark old hall; and there the servants took possession of him, and she went winding slowly up the stair. His curiosity was riveted on her.

She appeared at the table for dinner, evidently forgiven, very plainly dressed in a clear white dimity with blue ribbons, her hair turned back from the forehead, disclosing the loveliest white brow, the undergrowth of auburn advancing upon it in ripples, as when the tide comes in softly. The mass was supported with a white fillet bound about the head Greek fashion; and yet what could such a girl know of the goddesses who in marble or more perishable clay kept the connoisseur company in his London abode? He, however, recognized the touch and marvelled.

She looked down the table at Greville and smiled discreetly, but perhaps saw more than the quick glance indicated. A handsome man with cold, neatly-chiselled features, we have him still to the life in fine mezzotint, the eyes somewhat too deep and eager to convince the beholder, and a little of his scrutinizing, valuing air about it for all; the hair clubbed and powdered—a man of noble breeding impossible to pass for plebeian in a revolution if it were to save his life. A self-possessed and dignified young man of thirty. Four other men were present, including Sir Harry, and certainly this was the pick of the basket. Fair Emma knew it, as women know all such lore, instinctively, although for certain her life had not been passed with Grevilles.

"He looks like a great lord!" she thinks, trying to recall how fish should be eaten in elegant company. "No knife—a fork and a crust?—yes, that's it."

She talked little at dinner, smiling slightly when addressed, and eating little also. The ladies of Mr. Greville's society would trifle with their food, and push it aside with hand disdainful. She had fortified herself for this display by a huge hunch of cake upstairs and a bowl of creamy milk, for those roses and lilies were not nurtured on air.

When the covers were removed, Sir Harry, now warm and generous with wine, gave the gentlemen a running account of the tussle, and demanded of Greville to bear witness whether Mrs. Hart hadn't rode like a damned jockey, and whether a man could keep up anger against a girl that showed such spunk, for all she was a disobedient little vixen that might think herself lucky she had a whole bone in her skin that night.

Greville assented—the finest sight he had seen, says he, and with Sir Harry's pardon might he propose they drink Mrs. Hart's very good health on it?—which they accordingly did with three times three, and the heroine modestly retired to make tea in the drawing-room with Mrs. Apton, the housekeeper, for company until the men lurched in, and Mrs. Apton scuttled off.

Lurched, all but Greville. He was as cool as a cucumber, for the situation was too good to be misted with the fumes of wine. Moreover, he was never one to heat his brain for nothing though he could take his glass like a gentleman. He placed himself opposite Emma, across the broad hearth, that he might study her on the sly. Sir Harry called on her for a song, and the dilettante in Greville prepared to be displeased with all but the sight of those beautiful lips opening their portals to melody. What could be expected?—the peacock, the pheasant, have voices worse than the scritch of the jay, and beauty is too often peacock-toned. She sang without accompaniment, if it be not Sir Harry's snores half way through,

a ballad such as village pedlars will not have forgotten, but the words pleasing, the tune simple and striking; "The Raggle-taggle Gipsies, O!" and gave it with a fine dash and spirit.

> Last night I lay in a goose-feather bed
> With my good lord beside me, O,
> To-night I'll lie in a tenant's barn
> Whatever may betide me, O.

And so forth; the Countess tripping down the stair with all her maids about her to meet the black fire of the gipsy lover's eyes and her fate.

But the song itself slid off Greville, his taste was more on the Italian, the "Luce bella" order, with quirks and trills and brilliant fioriture, and the girl knew nothing of that. Yet she held him fixed—the voice was glorious, strong and clear and true on the notes; a noble instrument for passion, and nobly used, for her bosom expanded, her throat pulsed like a bird's and she poured it forth till the high ceiling rang again. And not only so, but the drama! The first verse, she sang sitting demurely, the great lady tripping down the stair with a thought for the velvet of her robes, the set of the pearl chains in her hair. Then rose, and the voice quickened, and at the last she flung her arms abroad and drew the wild air of the moors into her lungs. Freedom, freedom! —the pearl chains torn away and the barefoot woman following her man to hell if he called her. Wild fire shone in her eyes to answer the gipsy flame.

"I'm off with the raggle-taggle gipsy, O!" and stopped breathless, white arms gleaming above her head; then dropped them, and sat down demurely, the life fading from her face.

"Brava, brava!" cries Greville, applauding with ringing hands. For what was he an amateur of gem and crystal

if he did not know a jewel when he saw it, and this, by all the Olympians, was a jewel! Sir Harry never budged in his sleep, the others listened warm and drowsy.

"Sing again, Mrs. Hart," says one, and again she sang, but what did not stir so much this time; a rose and nightingale business, a little mawkish, and yet with high notes touched most wonderfully.

"A prima donna if trained!" thinks Greville. "And that face! Lord help us! The luck of that fool!" and cast the tail of his eye contemptuously on the unconscious Sir Harry.

"Have you seen any good acting, Madam?" Greville came across to the chair beside her, while the other men drowsed or talked foxes.

"Why, I've been to the play a few times, sir, here and there, not to say I know anything about it. I saw Mrs. Siddons play Lady Macbeth. Lord, how awful! My flesh did creep on my bones when she came in with the candle, gliding like a ghost all in white. Like so!"

She caught up a vase for the candle and moved slowly toward him with dead eyes turned inward on some horror, the head thrown back, mouth open, jaw a little dropped, clenched hands drawn back, a ghastly terror creeping about her. He stared spellbound. Wonderful—not sleep, but Fear incarnate, frozen in the bonds of sleep. She passed Sir Harry and tripped against his extended foot, and all but fell, recovering herself with a laugh.

"I near broke the vase that time!" says she laughing, and called it "vawse." "I declare, Sir Harry, if I had, 'twas your fault. Why don't you go to bed if you must stretch out like that!"

It waked them up, and presently Sir Harry began to troll a hunting chorus, and the men bore him company, and she took herself off laughing still and waving her hand at the door.

But when Greville sat in his room by the fine bursting flaming fire of beech logs he could think of nothing else. Her beauty; that was enough alone. Her voice, her posturing! Dim thoughts rolled and shaped in his mind.

"I wonder what Hamilton would think of her!" (For so he called his twenty-year older uncle. They were friends more than uncle and nephew from the beginning.) "All the Aphrodites come to life with a touch of the Medusa, and a strong dash of Euphrosyne. And what else, I wonder!"

He could not settle it and went to sleep on that.

CHAPTER II

THE ACQUAINTANCE RIPENS

During the next few days Greville watched her with ever-growing interest, and diagnosed her with the cool precision but discriminating admiration which he brought to his cabinets of rarities. It was easy to understand why and how Sir Harry had picked her up and easy also to judge that her lease of his affections (if they could be so called) would be brief and terminable on the resolve of the principal party. Sir Harry would have the submission of a whipped dog, and try as she would (and she tried her best by fits and starts) the girl could not crawl to his feet. She was too full of abounding animal energy, not to speak of force of character, to be tame, and, like most women of the uneducated classes, saw no reason for controlling her tongue. Out it all came with a burst when she was moved either to anger or pleasure.

"Fetherstone can't control her, for her awe must be founded on respect and she has no respect for him. He is too much a man of her own class in essentials. She fathoms him through and through and don't see anything superior to herself. If she met her superior, and he with a firm hand over her, she could be modelled into something to astonish the world—the only world she can ever move in."

So thinks Greville and in the reflections which occupied him believed he knew where that superior could be found. She was meanwhile a fascinating study. Not by any means the woman of pleasure, so he decided—not mer-

cenary, far more impassioned on the heart than the physical side; candid to danger-point when moved; defiant to her own hurt. Rather, she impressed him as one snared far less through temperament than by circumstance and the fact of her astonishing beauty. Such a girl would be attempted, persecuted, bribed wherever she went, and not only so but condemned to something very like starvation if she refused. For instance, what wise woman would take such a Helen into her service; and if she did, how otherwise than as the merest drudge, for the girl was nearly as ignorant and untaught as the wild rabbits in the park. He ascertained that she could read and, after a fashion, write, but no more. Then what choice had she? Who could blame this poor butterfly blown down a chill wind out to sea? All her glorious gifts were natural. It would be a pursuit as interesting as any collecting to pass them in review, catalogue them, and see what they were worth in the market—a better market than the mere sale of her body to the first comer. She was capable of other reaches of beauty than this, he believed. He watched her always.

She came out with the guns sometimes, a thing no lady of breeding would have done, and tramped the deep fallows along with them, and through the copses and spinneys and the dry fern where Sir Harry's tall deer showed branching antlers. And the hard exercise that would have made a fine lady swoon did but bring the divinest flush to the cheeks of this daughter of the hedgerows, and brightened her great limpid eyes until they beamed like stars. Greville would have given much to know what she herself made of her life, what her hopes were. The best he could see was the chance that one of Sir Harry's boon companions might take a liking for her when the Up Park episode should finish and so start another connection. Meanwhile he was witness to the queerest scenes, in which

he tried to comprehend the girl's personality and found it baffling.

There was the evening when Squire Weldon of Harting —more than a little overseas—declared and swore he believed that no woman could own such sheaves of hair and he would wager the half of it was false.

"And for why I think so," says he, with drunken cunning. "I observe you wear always that kind of ribbon bandage to hold it up and hide where the true joins the false—a neat little trick and becoming. Now I knew a woman in Bedford and her hair was to her knees—" and so forth, maundering on, the girl with a book of pictures on her knee pretending not to notice him.

"Emily!" commanded Sir Harry, rousing himself in his chair. "You show that gentleman he's mistook, for I won't have my belongings disparaged. I say you're a perfect beauty, and if any one denies it I'll prove him in the wrong. Take that ribbon off your head and let them see, one and all!"

He carried so much wine that Greville reflected with an inward laugh 'twas lucky he stopped at the ribbon. Would she refuse? He would like her the better if she did, and he had seen her thwart her master on a lesser matter. She might yet be a Vashti.

The men sat staring and laughing. Did she refuse? Not she! A glow coloured her face—not anger, but pleasure and pride. Her eyes glittered.

"If any one says it isn't my own I'll show him what God gave me!" cries she, and began unknotting her ribbon.

We all know that fillet binding her glorious auburn waves. Romney painted it, lingered over it, loved it. It was true Greece, though she never guessed it; the Bacchante's wear when with girt-up robe she runs through the woods, shouting her wild fellows from their lairs to

follow Him of the leopard skin and the thyrsus. We see it to-day in her pictures that cannot die while beauty lives.

A few swift dexterous turns of the hand and she flung down the ribbon at her feet, and pulling out a few pins stuck them in her mouth like a maid-servant, and then shook her head. Down rolled the torrent, a royal mantle, chestnut woven with gold, and so veiled her near to the ankles. She turned herself about to show the smooth undulations feathering into pure gold at the tips.

"There's for you!" cries Sir Harry. "Has any of you a girl to match that? You may pull it if you will, Weldon, to see if it isn't tight where it grows. Hold it out, Emily."

She held it out like wings shining to either side, the men marvelling. There was enough and to spare of the praise and comment that fed her vanity then. But Greville said nothing, though her seeking eye turned in his direction, and presently the cards were got out and the heroine knotted the locks up with simulated carelessness and so went off to the upper end of the room with her book, forgotten in the gamble.

He stood out and followed her after a while, sitting near her out of ear-range but well within eye-shot of Sir Harry. No risks for Greville.

He asked her what pictures amused her, and to his surprise she turned the book and showed him a fine set of Flaxman's illustrations to the Iliad and Odyssey; figures beautiful, severe, dignified; the pure and perfect line that in so much resembled her own surpassing grace. On the open page the goddess Calypso, loose robe flowing in noble folds, directed the shipwright labours of Ulysses, clear-featured, akin to heaven but bound to earth by love.

"Where on earth did you get this?" says he in astonishment.

"In the liberary," replied Mrs. Hart, struggling with the redundant syllable.

"And do you like it? Do you understand it?"

"Not a word. But it pleases me. The women are fine to look at. I dress as near that as I can. What are they?"

"Goddesses," condescended Mr. Greville, smiling superior.

"What's a goddess?" was the next question.

He explained as best he could, and, unwilling to lose the opportunity for a lesson, finished with some emphasis by saying that they knew their own worth and were above the mean vanities and tempers of common women. Therefore were they loved and respected.

"You mean," says she, as sharp as a needle, "that I shouldn't rage the way I'm apt. I know you saw me smack Betty's face t'other day when she let fall the tea on my muslin gownd. Well, I wouldn't have done it if I'd known you was coming. I know, too, I anger Sir Harry, answering back, and that'll be the worse for me. But what am I to do if I feel that way? I'm fit to burst my girdle sometimes. Things do so anger me."

"You make a great mistake in such behaviour, since you invite my opinion." His very voice awed her, with the clear-cut vowels and consonants and the cool distinction of phrase and manner. Sir Harry spoke like a Sussex gentleman, but Greville like a prince, she thought; there was a serene remoteness about him, as from the height of a throne, which was sufficiently alarming, but attracting also.

She was woman enough to sense his contempt of Sir Harry, and that in itself set him high. Suddenly her eyes gloomed. She grew reckless.

"And what does it matter what I do? Here to-day and gone to-morrow as the saying is? The likes of me

end in a ditch mostly. A short life and a merry one, say I! I'll go my own way, and let them that don't like me leave me!"

Greville was in no way stirred. He turned a leaf or two and considered the illustrations. Then, with studied politeness:

"You mistake very much, madam, if you consider your career so hopeless. You have gifts that might be improved and win you a secure position. At present you throw them away—if you will allow me to be frank—in vulgar"—he hesitated delicately at the word—"tantrums that bring you to a lower level than you merit. 'Tis a great pity."

Her mood changed again instantly.

"Oh, sir, I beseech you not call me madam. I'm but a poor country girl, and it confuses me that I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels. Call me Emily, and for God's sake advise me, for I don't see no end to all this, but slipping back in the mud. You must know Sir Harry's temper is violent. Look here, bend this way. He won't see."

She lifted the muslin sleeve, lightly tied with ribbon, doing this with a wary eye on the other end of the room, and disclosed an arm like country cream but disfigured with black bruises above the elbow. The print showed the grip of a man's powerful hand on the softness.

"No doubt you vexed him, yet it should not be." Greville motioned her to pull down the sleeve. "But I would have you know, Emily—since that name is your wish—that life is a thing to be made much as we would have it. You have good looks, a voice that if trained would bring you notice, and I should not despair of an actress's career if you was taught, but if you can't govern yourself and take pains there's no hope, for you can never be respected."

He harped on this string, you observe. It was perhaps not difficult to see how she coveted applause and the general good opinion. But respect!

"Oh, sir, who could respect a girl like me?"

The beautiful forlorn grey eyes were so appealing that Greville, having carefully noted that she sat with her back to the card players, crossed his silk-clad legs indolently and unbent a little.

"There's no position where respect can't be won. I am acquainted with Mrs. Wells—a lady whose is the very position you hold here—and so far as she is known she is universally respected. Does she flame and quarrel with those about her? No. Does she overstrain sentiment and imagination and always consider herself slighted unless every eye is upon her? Not she! Does she make foolish and vulgar exhibitions of her charms for the pleasure of other men besides him to whom she owes her home? No, indeed. She is well-governed, discreetly alluring, diffuses a charming serenity, and has the pleasing art to retain a lover as a friend when she passes on to the next happy possessor."

The wisdom of the Serpent, and Eve listening fascinated. Though a little beyond her in some respects, Greville's calm enthusiasm aroused her own.

"That's a real lady!" she said, looking down pensively, "but I fear 'tis beyond me." Then, flashing suddenly into the personal. "How do you know her so well, sir? No, I don't like the woman! I'll not imitate her."

Greville withdrew his chair by an inch. He uncrossed his legs and was dignified.

"If this were not the speech of a pettish child, I should rebuke it severely! How I knew Mrs. Wells is not of importance. But to illustrate what I wished to mark, the lady has been and is under the protection of men of the

highest birth and breeding. From them she has studied good manners and—"

"Oh, Mr. Greville, answer me this only: Is she with you?"

The face was so eager and troubled that he again relaxed a little.

"Certainly not, but I have the satisfaction to meet so agreeable a person at a friend's house occasionally and think her an excellent example for a young woman like yourself. A man must always respect discretion in a woman and if—"

Again interruption, the words bubbling out unrestrained:

"Oh, I'll learn of her, indeed I will. She wouldn't have pulled down her hair to let the men see. Couldn't I tell the dislike in your eye! But why *didn't* you approve? Tell me and I'll do my best to comprehend you. Oh, what a friend I might have in you could I deserve it! No one in this world ever spoke to me before, nor cared a straw but to make me pass the time for 'em."

Mr. Greville assumed his best didactic style; the one that angered many men, but, expressed in his beautiful enunciation, impressed women from duchesses downward to the mesdames Wells of his acquaintance.

"No, I could not approve. Sure you can see it is to make your favours cheap, and what is cheap is scorned. Men other than the one who protects you should be treated with a perfectly agreeable good humour, but a decent reserve, and of all things you should avoid to anger the man on whose bounties you depend."

"Bounties!" cried the fair listener, and instantly controlled herself, with heaving bosom.

"Bounties!" repeated the instructor firmly. "He takes you to decorate his home and enhance his comforts, and

though Sir Harry had not the breeding to object to that particular display you often cross him more than is proper. I don't myself approve of his method. Were a girl of your abilities in my possession I should have her educated. I believe you might repay it."

There was a pause. A long one. Then, softly clasping her hands and regarding him with dewy eyes, the pupil said in a whisper:

"Oh, would that I was! Would that I was!"

That ended the conversation at the moment, for Greville rose immediately, and with a light remark began studying the pictures on the wall, walking slowly round the room, his arms behind him, until he joined the card players again, and complimented Sir Harry on his possessions, when the game ended. He did not, however, allude to the most surprising of them and was guarded afterwards in his approaches to it. Yet the conversation was renewed from time to time and always on the same lines, her possibilities, faults, conduct, and the hope which might tinge the future should she deserve better.

There was a sheltered spot in an angle of the house where she sat when the sun shone, and here he would surprise her sometimes with her book—trying to master what the author would be at. Once, with writing materials, improving her writing. It was touching and the eyes looking up beneath her gipsy hat, soft in its shadow, were more touching still.

"I do my best, Mr. Greville—a poor best!" said she, raising the ill-formed characters to his notice. "Ah, if I'd but been educated, what a girl I might have been! There's no chance without it."

She was as pat as his echo. That was her way, though he did not understand it. She took her colour *chameleon* fashion from the leaf that sheltered her, and was boisterous and hoyden with Sir Harry, quiet and engaging with

him, and had a hundred other qualities behind ready to match those she came across. Was there any real fixed personality under it all? God knows! Her moods were as volatile as they were passionate at the moment.

Now and always, she was the pupil to Greville's condescension. It served her as usefully as it did him later. They fitted like a mosaic.

He looked down at the straggling letters, the blot at the top, the spelling.

"Indeed you advance, Emily, and when I leave I have no objection if you write me your news once or twice. 'Tis possible I may be here in February and renew the acquaintance."

"Acquaintance!" she cried with warmth. "No—I don't understand that word, Mr. Greville. You've given me the wish to improve, and I count you for a friend indeed. I'll study two hours each day faithfully until I have the happiness to see you once more."

She meant it probably at the moment, yet most certainly would not fulfil the promise with the master's eye removed to London, but this did not occur to Greville's estimate of his influence.

"You do yourself justice, my dear Emily. I have a sincere wish to see you improve and—"

She caught one word and caressed it with lingering sweetness.

"Your dear Emily! Can the poor unhappy girl be Greville's dear Emily? Oh, how happy for me could that be possible, but no, it never, never will be. And do you go soon?"

"In four days, but you will not pass wholly from my mind. I shall wonder occasionally if Emily is studious and loves her work."

"She will, she shall!" cries the pupil softly, "and when you come again you shall say, 'Mrs. Wells is admirable,

but Emily too improves and behaves as I would have her.' Oh, Greville, Sir Harry yesterday flung his boot after me because I wouldn't bring him t'other and Hawkins was downstairs, and indeed my temptation was to fly upon him and drive the boot at his head. But not me. I recalled your words and advanced and fetched it. 'Sir,' says I, politely, 'I won't imitate your bad manners. Here's your boot, and I'll desire Hawkins to come to you when I go down!' Was that well?"

"Excellent—on the whole!" says Greville, qualifying, "but you might have left out the bad manners. Men don't love to be reproached. A gentle endearing sweetness would have served your turn better. Again, don't suppose I defend Sir Harry, but it is the woman to bend and adapt herself suavely to the man's requirements."

With tear-filled eyes she owned him in the right and promised to repay his interest by gratefully doing as he bid her.

Her docility delighted him. He knew it sincere, as indeed it was, and supposed it not so much a mere vein of gold as the basis of her nature. What he could not estimate was that the violent scenes with Sir Harry, the rollicking songs and jests with his companions, were equally natural and a part of her many-coloured temperament. She was exactly what her surroundings might be. Life, for her, was a drama and she played the part the moment allotted, boldly adapting herself to her fellow actors. She reflected their own personalities in increased vividness, eager only to catch and retain the part of prima donna, be it what it would. This was instinctive. She was ignorant that she caught Greville by his desire to instruct and prose, to express his store of maxims where they would be heard with reverence and exalt him by displaying a masterpiece of his own discovery, whether woman or crystal. Yet she did it, and had she held a

chart of his mental windings, could not have done it better.

Is this the secret of the immortal siren who flashes out on us from so many conquering faces down the pages of history—to catch and repeat a lover, but with the added passion of sex and temperament on honeyed lips ripe for kisses? The Greeks, it may be, aimed at this truth in declaring that in the Trojan Helen every man beheld his heart's delight in the form he best loved; which, we may believe, will mostly be the reflection of himself. It was no nymph, but the boy Narcissus, who fell in love with his own image in the pool, and does this eternally.

He had several brief passages with her before the four days passed, and each time she grew on him surprisingly. It was against his code to meddle with another man's mistress, and entirely against his inclination to incur the complications it would ensure. Sir Harry would resent with loud complaint and oath any such poaching and the clubs would ring with his honest indignation. Greville, be sure, had no intention of upsetting his own quiet comfort and running the risk of making himself ridiculous for a woman of Emily Hart's character, but was equally determined that he would not lose sight of her.

Their real parting took place the day before he left and it was in the park, where he met her returning from an errand of mercy to some old goody in the village, her basket swinging in her hand, and a furred cloak about her that made her bloom most exquisitely soft and fair. He commended her kind heart, which indeed was no more than justice, and did not mention that he had seen her from his window and had hastened down by the short cut through the garden for a last word. This would have made her too confident.

"We are to part to-morrow, Emily," says he with a certain solemnity, "and since I cannot repeat it in public,

let me hope my words will not be forgotten, for all your future must now depend on your conduct. You are not seventeen, and prosperity and security may yet be yours if you are discreet and govern your impulses. *There* is the whole secret. Impulse has been and will be your ruin unless controlled."

It must certainly appear that this young man as he walked discoursing beside her was a finished prig, the born preacher of an immoral morality. Nature was a force he dreaded and despised, and he had carefully pruned and grafted it in his own case so that no rebellious shoots and tendrils should trouble his peace. In spite of all his wise saws and modern instances, it was in this girl to burst into a tropic luxuriance of blossom that must wreathe her with crowns undreamed of in his arid philosophy, and make the world itself marvel. Had she pruned and trimmed and clipped as she tried her best to do for his sake, that strange and brilliant future had never been.

She promised, however, passionately, and with a warmth he thought excessive, adding:

"And may I write to you, Greville, and will you despise my poor letters, and will you still interest yourself for my good and write to tell me so?"

"You may certainly write to me if the need arises, my dear Emily, for your attention to all I say convinces me you have good qualities. Naturally I cannot write to you. This would be to treat Sir Harry in a way I neither can nor will, and might have unpleasant consequences. Let me know if anything should occur to part you from him, and when that day comes I believe you may find he will make a provision for you that shall mark his esteem for your conduct."

Provision was not in her view; the fact that Greville was passing out of her life, possibly for ever, drowned

that and all else. She caught his hand, and looked at him with quivering lips.

"Oh, how shall I thank you for your divine goodness to a poor girl like me? Oh, Greville, Greville, don't forget me! But you won't for all you're such a great gentleman and makes Sir Harry and all the rest look like Sussex boors. And your knowledge— What is there you don't know? Things I never even heard tell of and can't never hope for. Oh, if I never see you again—and Heaven forbid it, for you *must* come in February—I'll remember you till my dying day, and say 'Greville didn't despise the poor Emily. He knew she had a heart to feel his words that he honoured her with—and to love him! To love him!' "

She was sobbing now hysterically. He looked around with swift caution and drew her into the shade of a copse of evergreens uncommanded by the windows of the house, for this emotion must not be seen. Here he exhorted her to compose herself, and in vain.

It was inevitable, since she could not, that he should put his arms about the lovely mourner. Her cheek rested against his, their lips met, the basket lay forgotten at their feet.

She was obliged to remain a while in the shade to wipe the tears from her face when he strode off to join the other gentlemen coming back from their shooting. He never looked back.

Next day in the hall, Mrs. Hart curtseyed charmingly to Mr. Greville's bow as he said farewell, half deafened by Sir Harry's ringing exhortations to return in February.

CHAPTER III

THE EXPLOSION

Greville did not return in February. He had other and more important invitations and time a little dulled the strong impression Emily Hart had made upon him. She had written more than once, dutiful ill-spelt letters, monuments of labour—love's labour, and not wholly lost.

He had also seen her twice, for she insisted with Sir Harry on coming up to London to visit her mother, a simple, good-natured old body, now decorated with the remarkable name of Mrs. Cadogan (Heavens knows why!) and, through Greville's own influence, serving as cook in the family of one of the numerous Hamilton and Greville connections. He had not wholly approved of the step of coming to London. Her enthusiasm and energy, far from warming his tepid blood, rather alarmed him than otherwise. He declined to see her but in Mrs. Cadogan's presence and, though condescending and encouraging on the moral-immoral lines, was guarded. That anxiety for her mother's company might mislead Sir Harry but could not himself. Months passed after the last visit with a letter or two, and then a silence. It certainly did not flatter him to believe he might be forgotten and that she was adjusting herself so comfortably to Sir Harry that outside interests were fading. Yet it might be so. The brief letters certainly showed no sign of study or improvement—she must therefore value his exhortations more lightly. That irked him somehow. It touched both curiosity and

vanity, and breaking his almost invariable rule he wrote her a few friendly lines—no more.

He sat one morning in his London house in his embroidered Turkish dressing-gown, arranging a small cabinet of gems and intaglios belonging to his uncle, Sir William Hamilton, for which he had made himself responsible on their arrival in London. His letter acknowledging them lay on the table beside him.

"My dear Hamilton," it began, for so he always called this almost brother-uncle, "I never saw anything more beautiful than this Medusa on agate. Your usual good fortune always attends you—" and so forth. His whole mind was on this as he moved and replaced the beautiful fossils of antique art with delicate fingers. He wished, indeed, at least a part of them were his own, for a schedule of expenses had given him some discomfort the night before, and it was clearly a choice between cutting down certain luxuries and selling one or two treasures to make both ends meet. A younger son of a great family is often face to face with these little difficulties. It is hard to be the same flesh and blood as the elder brother and see all the money, land, and nearly all the consideration flow in that channel, leaving the younger dry.

"A rich wife? True—but then—"

The gems occupied him now. He was bending over the cabinet in deep attention when his man brought in a post letter, ill-scrawled and sealed, with drops of wax about it as if the sender had suffered from extreme haste and agitation.

It fell into that calm, retired atmosphere of extreme culture and quiet like a meteor from another and more volcanic world of upheavals, but it did not hurry Charles Greville though he knew the hand. He still continued his delicate work until all were neatly sorted, the cabinet locked and the key in his pocket. And not till then did

he slit the paper with a silver knife, and spread the big sheet open before him. The postmark was Chester, which somewhat surprised him.

Good Lord!—that brutal beast Sir Harry! He was turning her loose on the world, an expectant mother and without a guinea—a girl of seventeen! Yet even before he read the rest his prudence had suggested the thought that as likely as not she had brought it on herself by some unpardonable levity. Caution—caution! That was the basis of all his thoughts as he read. It went on like the cry of a tortured, unreasoning animal, a hare caught in a gin awaiting its murderer. That would not have moved him, but this stirred him somewhat.

"Yesterday did I receve your kind letter. It put me in some spirits for believe me I am allmost distrackdid. I have never hard from Sir H and he is not at Lechster now, I am sure. I have wrote 7 letters and no anser. What shall I dow? Good God, what shall I dow? I can't come to town for want of mony. I have not a farthing to bless myself with and I think my friends looks cooly on me. I think so. O. G. what shall I dow? Oh how your letter affected me when you wished me happiness. O. G. that I was in your possession or in Sir H's what a happy girl would I have been! Girl indeed! What else am I but a girl in distres—in reall distres. For God's sak, G. write the minet you get this, and only tell me what I am to dow. Direct same whay. I am allmos mad. Oh for God's sake tell me what is to become on me. O dear Greville write to me. Write to me. G. adue and believe yours for ever, Emily Hart. Don't tell my mother what distres I am in, and do afford me some comfort."

A strange letter for a man of his age to be faced with since it did not concern him personally. He sat staring at it with distaste, seasoned with pity. Girls must expect to suffer who have no safeguards in a world made for and

by men, but after all she was very young, and Sir Harry, with his abounding plenty, a brute. He sat long, for there was much to consider—even more for himself than for her. He drew up two mental columns for and against what she was obviously praying for. He liked the girl after a fashion; her docility pleased him; her passionate and submissive adoration of his own greatness won him; her beauty stirred him more than any he had ever beheld. Here he paused for a swift review of the past and deciding that so it certainly was, passed on to the next consideration. Now if he were to take a little home for her in the suburbs and make it his headquarters he might well sell or let this great mansion in Portman Square and thus pass the time in modest retrenchment until he could find the exactly suitable heiress who must ultimately become the Honourable Mrs. Charles Greville and provide him with unlimited means for the purchase of articles of *virtu*. This economy might be a most valuable matter to him at the present moment. And lastly, there was pity. Greville's heart was not as mineralogical as his collections. It must be a petrifaction through and through if he were not stirred to compassion by this hopeless plight of despairing youth. It was not that. He remembered the great impassioned eyes, dewy with tears, looking into his own in the evergreen copse. He remembered the long embrace. He remembered her almost frantic joy when she stepped from the coach in London from those visits to her mother, the so-called Mrs. Cadogan, and found him waiting for her with his superfine air of a great gentleman who dropped these favours as trifles from chilly altitudes. How lovely she had been, all sparkling, smiling, trembling, gay as a daffodil tossing on a spring breeze. And he remembered, for in this gentleman prudence was his foremost virtue, that the fact of Mrs. Cadogan's presence in London would relieve him from much responsibility

should he decide to be gracious, and furthermore that he had heard she was an unsurpassable cook. She would naturally follow her daughter's fortunes if needful and be a faithful steward of her interests.

Yet on the other side must be set the uncertainties of such a connection. Naturally it would not reflect on his own character, but he knew Emily's temper uncertain, and her conduct to himself while in Sir Harry's possession certainly suggested possible levities which he would not for one moment endure. Yet again, why should he? A very modest provision would always free him, especially with Mrs. Cadogan in the background.

And though he had no money to fling about idly he had quite sufficient for discreetly conducted pleasures. Above all, he hoped and expected everything from Emily's obedience and the amazed gratitude which any condescension now would rivet to him unmovably. He could imagine her saving every expense, waiting in tender submission on his every look, lovely, worshipping—a sweeter Eve enclosed in a Paradise no other man should enter. Would he expose her to the attentions of a set of roisterers like Sir Harry's companions? Never!

But the final thought that clinched his resolves was that never man could own a more wonderful pupil. The more he reviewed and dissected, the more certain he became that here was an uncut jewel of many carats and facets. To cut, to polish, to make her a lady, a woman of demirep fashion, a brilliant Aspasia, singing, posing, acting, the desired of all desires—this would be fame and envy in his world, and contempt for the boor who had tossed her away like a common pebble.

At last he saw his path. He drew the paper to him, read it once more and set himself to the answer. In short, he had decided he could rule her.

"My dear Emily, I do not make apologies for Sir H.'s behaviour to you, and altho' I advised you to deserve his esteem by your good conduct, I own I never expected better from him. It was your duty to deserve good treatment from him, and it gave me great concern to see you imprudent the first time you came from the country, as the same conduct was repeated when you was last in town, I began to despair of your happiness. To prove to you that I do not accuse you falsely I only mention five guineas and half a guinea for coach. But, my dear Emily, as you seem quite miserable now I do not mean to give you uneasiness but comfort, and tell you I will forget your bad conduct to Sir H. and myself, and will not repent my good humour if I find you have learned by experience to value yourself and preserve your friends by good conduct and affection.

I will now answer your letter.

You tell me your friends look coolly on you; it is therefore time to leave them; but it is necessary for you to decide some points before you come to town. You are sensible that for the next three months your situation will not admit a giddy life if you wished it. After you have told me Sir H. neither provides for you nor takes any notice of your letters, it might appear laughing at you to advise you to make Sir H. more kind and attentive. I do not think a great deal of time should be lost, for I have never seen a woman clever enough to keep a man who is tired of her. But it is a great deal more for me to *advise you never* to see him again and write only to inform him of your determination. You must, however, do either the one or the other. You may easily see, my dear Emily, why it is absolutely necessary for this point to be settled before I can move one step. If you love Sir H. you should not give him up.

But besides this, my Emily, I would not be troubled with your connections (excepting your mother) and with Sir H.'s friends for the universe. My advice is then to take a steady resolution.

I shall then be free to dry up the tears of my lovely Emily and give her comfort. If you do not forfeit my esteem perhaps my Emily may be happy. You know I have been so by avoiding the vexation which frequently arises from ingratitude and caprice.

Nothing but your letter and your distress could incline me to alter my system, but remember I never will give up my peace or continue my connection one moment after my confidence is betrayed. If you should come to town and take my advice you should take another name. By degrees I could get you a new set of acquaintances, and by keeping your own secret I may expect to see you respected and admired. Thus far as relates to yourself. As to the child, its mother shall obtain its kindness from me and it shall never want. I enclose you some money: do not throw it away. God bless you, my dearest lovely girl, take your determination and let me hear from you once more. Adieu, my dear Emily."

He read this epistle through twice (with certain passages omitted here), then folded and sealed it with his usual impeccable care. He knew it must shine like a rainbow in blackest clouds through the rain-wet eyes that would read it.

"I have three safeguards," he reflected, as he impressed it with his seal of a flying Eros in cornelian, "money—she has none, nor prospects. The child, for who else will spend a doit on it? And gratitude—unless the old lady, her mother, urges her on to make a better market of such beauty."

It will be observed that Greville put gratitude last. He

prided himself on his knowledge of the human and especially the feminine heart. So he finally despatched his letter.

Next day he wrote to his dear Hamilton, between whom and himself ran a pleasant link of exchanged peccadilloes as well as of articles of *virtu*. He was wont to dissect the immoral in his reflections to Hamilton as well as in his own heart, and he did it now, dwelling slightly on the arrangement he contemplated and fully on his reasons for making it. He did not spare his Emily's past. An immaculate one would have appeared as absurd in Sir William's eyes as his own in such circumstances, and there was no thought of concealment. But it afforded an opening for the reflections on women which he privately judged worthy to be classed with the epigrams of the mighty, and, indeed, they were pretty well for a man of thirty odd. Thus he wrote of the weaker vessel.

"With women I observe they have only resource in art, and there is to them no interval between plain ground and the precipice, and the springs of action are so much in the extreme of the sublime and the low that no absolute dependence can be given by men—" and so forth—Rochefoucauld and water, but very impressive to Sir William Hamilton, who, though the elder, was deeply influenced by his handsome nephew's worldly skill and finesse. Greville, at all events, did justice to Emily's beauty, or as he now insisted on calling her, "Emma's," that name being in vogue as a romantic variant, and as such gladly adopted in the change he suggested.

"Emma," he wrote, "is the most amazing beauty that ever my eyes lit on. I long, my dear Hamilton, for your opinion to support mine that on the whole she is quite unequalled in either of our memories. Contemplating her from the point of view of a student of the perfect standard of the antique I know no alteration I could have

recommended either in face or figure unless it were possibly a little more delicacy of the hands and feet. Her masses of hair spring from a brow as low and broad as the Clytie's, the length and roundness of her throat suggest **our Roman Venus,** the moulding of back and bosom the Stooping Venus, and—"

But why continue? All that he and Sir William had ever passed in delighted review in Italy was summoned to draw the fairest picture in the elder man's mind that words could frame or memory paint. "And even this falls short of the reality," ended the letter. "Could you imagine a man being such a ruffianly fool as to fling away such a jewel—the perfectest modern-antique that ever human eye beheld? I hope to make her a really economic housekeeper, for you know my needs are urgent and the house in Portman Square a terrible drain on my resources. I shall now proceed to let it."

Sir William in reply expressed himself as passionately desirous to see the Renaissance beauty, as he termed her. "Your Emma reads like one of the sumptuous Venetian beauties whose calm and noble lines recall the antique dignity of the great Roman families. May it not be long ere I feast my eyes upon your choice."

Greville could not acquiesce in the epithet, "calm." He had met Emma at the office of the Cheshire coach a few days before and had much ado to prevent her flinging her arms about him in public in her glowing delight and enthusiasm. He warded this off, however, until they were in the hackney coach, and there, do what he would, she fell upon his shoulder sobbing and laughing in a breath.

"I knew—I knew at Up Park that something was to come of it. Oh, Greville, I knew you could not be so kind to me for nothing. Sure I was made to serve and love you, and is it really, really true I am to be with you and keep your house? Oh, indeed, you shall never have to

complain of me. Every word I speak shall be considered, every action—"

He tried in vain to stem the outflow and finding that impossible submitted with patience for the length of a street and then turned the subject to her journey. Had he sent her an ample supply of money? She felt in her pocket beneath her long cloak and displayed a little, shabby purse with a half guinea and some loose shillings.

"Did I calculate so near as that? I would have sent you more had I known." He spoke with compunction, looking at the remainder.

"Oh, Greville, you sent nobly; but there was a poor old woman in the coach, going to see her sick son at Greenwich, and a sailor too, and I couldn't see her want for a meal and a drop of something warm to comfort her poor old heart, and I gave her—"

Greville's cold eye arrested her. She looked up almost trembling.

"You gave her *my* money!"—with an awful pause between each word. "A guinea? Emma, you are hopeless. Indeed, I have no hopes of you. A heedless, wasteful girl! *When* will you consider?"

A pause, her head hanging down like a flower in the rain. Not a word to say for herself.

He relented presently and she revived as quickly as a dog beaten and then received into favour. Eagerly she promised amendment.

"I must give, Greville. I can't say no somehow, but I promise and declare to you it shall never be more than a halfpenny at one time. Will you allow that? Just one halfpenny."

Even Greville was wrung into a smile. No, he would not mind that. It was agreed.

He left her with Mrs. Cadogan, beheld the meeting—a little awed by his stately presence—viewed with con-

descension the two rooms chosen at his expense, and then departed. He did not intend to see either again until the house at Edgware Row, Paddington Green should be ready for occupation, and its new mistress ready to take up her duties.

Her situation repelled his fastidiousness, though she carried it with the physical indifference and health of the peasant to whom such matters are a trifle in nature's way, and her cloak was womanly draped about her.

By a coincidence he met Sir Harry Fetherstonehaugh two nights later at Almack's and was obliged to submit to a greeting he would have avoided if he could.

"Why, how was it you never came down this winter? I don't know as I ever saw the birds stronger on the wing. I had the old set down and plenty good sport."

"And hunting?" asked Greville.

"Good, take it for all. No long hard frosts. Oh!—you heard the little girl I had down there has left me, did you? Emily Hart."

"I think I did, now you mention it." Greville was idly looking at the dancers in the room beyond. Sir Harry could not flatter himself he was interesting his audience.

"Yes, and if you hear it spread about I was harsh with her, I beg you'd contradict it. I hear as how Weldon should say he'd have given her a home had he known the facts. Well, sir, the facts were these: That girl, she'd kick up the very devil's own dust if you crossed her in anything, and I ask your reason, is a man to expect this from a mere slut? And then, she didn't know how to behave to the men I brought down. Either held herself away and wouldn't look at 'em if they didn't please her, or was too friendly if they did. Mind, I don't mean to accuse her of more than a hail fellow well met, but who, I ask you, was madam to indulge herself in her whims when all she was to think of was how to please *me*?"

Greville responded in an indistinct murmur. He was undoubtedly relieved to find the indictment no heavier. It might have been one to give a blow to his dreams of quiet settlement.

"So I just upped and said we must part, and, had she shown a spark of good nature, even then might have relented—"

"Excuse me, I see a man I must speak with—urgent business. Return soon!" Greville shot out, and so away with him and left the baronet staring. The more so as he joined no man, but an extremely dignified and beautiful lady of middle age, the famous Duchess of Argyll, formerly Duchess of Hamilton and cousin of Greville's uncle, Sir William Hamilton. Stars of such magnitude scarcely shone in Sir Harry's personal heaven, and he looked on a little sourly while Greville, perfectly at his ease, squired the great lady into the dancing room, laughing and talking.

"I wonder now did I make any mess of what I was saying about that little spitfire!" he thought to himself. "I wouldn't lose Greville's good word, so I wouldn't. But I'm glad to be rid of her for all! A man wants a new face about him and must be master and more."

As I dismiss Sir Harry here, his future fate may be given. A pretty and virtuous girl, the daughter of one of his village labourers, caught his roving fancy next and would have none of his secret approaches. It is possible that Mrs. Hart's adventures, well known in the village, served as a beacon in dangerous seas. She rebuffed him quietly but firmly, and the more he floundered, the deeper the hook pierced his gills. He was a man who could not endure defeat, but must have the victory however ruinous the cost. His friends watched the struggle with an interest chiefly expressed in heavy wagers, yet even this circumstance, though perfectly well known to him, could not

save him from a much happier fate than he deserved. For the girl married him and made him an excellent wife and Lady Featherstonehaugh, and a sensible, well-conducted mistress of his great house, in breeding and temper matching him far better than a lady of quality. A man who has erred less has often been less happily suited than this gentleman who did not get his deserts.

Greville, however, never used her ladyship as an example of instruction for his Emma, considering that this amazing circumstance might excite hopes of an order the very last he wished to enter her mind, and it was not till many years later she knew the fate of her ancient admirer. She could laugh at it then for reasons Greville could never in his wildest dreams have anticipated.

So events drew on. The "little Emma" was born and despatched to her mother's distant village of Hawarden for tending, and that her neighbourhood might not inconvenience her young mother's protector.

And thus Mrs. Hart became Greville's housekeeper in Edgware Row, with Mrs. Cadogan's invaluable aid in the background.

CHAPTER IV

PEACE AND CATSPAWS

A MORE modest, decorous life than that in Edgware Row could scarcely be, setting aside the initial impropriety. The past fell away from her like a nightmare that daylight effaces and a young wife nestling in her husband's shelter could scarcely be more domestic than Emma. True, there came the reports of the little Emma from Hawarden and there were her small bills to be paid as a reminder, but Greville did this without comment, and who, thought her mother, could feel the existence of that pretty little innocent to be criminal, look at it how you would! That was hardly Greville's point of view. He was apt to consider any allusion to the child a lapse of taste and to repel it.

And certainly there was plenty else to occupy her thoughts. Emma kept the accounts, for a curry and a soup were more good Mrs. Cadogan's accomplishment than writing and ciphering. The accounts were perhaps not on the most scientific principle, but they served and were duly laid before the master every Monday. Here we have the day account for 29th October, 1784:

Baker's bill, one week.....	£0—4—11
Butter bill, one week.....	5— 1
Butcher	7— 8½
Gloves	1— 6
Coach	1— 0
Poor man.....	— ½
Apples	— 2½

Wherefrom we can deduce no guilty splendours, but a healthy appetite for bread and butter, and a promise kept to Greville to be straitened in that fairest virtue, charity. The gloves too, even multiplying the sums somewhat in view of the value of money a hundred and forty years gone by; such gloves would scarcely have pleased the consummate Mrs. Wells or her sisterhood. One must own to a slight disproportion in her milliner's bill, for "Mrs. Hackwood, £4—12—6" stares us in the face. Yet let the censorious remember it was the end of October, winter approaching, and velvet more suitable than straw, and ask himself what he supposes the hats that adorn the brow of beauty to-day cost their happy possessors. No, Greville had nothing to complain of on the score of extravagance. It is said the household expenses did not amount to more than £100 a year or thereabouts, and that Emma received but £30 a year for all her adornments.

He had certainly reason to thank his cook and housekeeper alike. It enabled him to take her education in hand more seriously than he had at first intended, and as it proceeded his interest grew. His love also? That must be judged on the consequences.

"It is time for us to start for Cavendish Square, Emma, and the hackney coach waits," says Greville, alert and clean-shaven, one bright May morning. "Romney is to study you for Circe to-day. Bring the white robe he desired."

A fair dishevelled head looks round the door with dismay in its eyes.

"What, not ready yet? 'Tis most inconsiderate in you, especially when you are aware the coachman charges for his time. I hate unpunctuality."

"Oh, but I was doing the flowers, Greville. You said

you liked a vase on the dining-table. You don't suppose I can be in two places at once."

She has got the word *vase* correctly now, but it does not mollify her lord.

"Leave those flowers instantly. How long will you take to arrange your hair and make yourself suitable?"

"Twenty minutes; I can't do it under. And what's more, I won't try."

"Twenty minutes! Do you consider no one's time of value but your own?"

The head retreats, and steps are heard on the stairs and a clear impertinent voice chanting:

> Should he upbraid I'll own that he prevail,
> And sing as sweetly as the nightingale.

No simple ballad now, but trills and shakes in the purest soprano imaginable; art decorating nature. And every trill and roulade, as he reflects indignantly, she owes to Charles Greville and to him alone. It was like a handful of bright spring water flung in his distinguished face.

Greville never acted hurriedly. He wrote a few words, folded and sealed them, went out to the hackney coachman and, desiring him to take the note to Mr. Romney in Cavendish Square, paid and dismissed him. The coach rolled slowly away and Greville sat down to read his magazine. He looked at his watch. Twenty minutes passed; twenty-five. There was a noise of hurrying footsteps overhead, the opening and shutting of drawers, the click of the wardrobe door he knew so well, Mrs. Cadogan's heavy weight pounding up the stair to the rescue. He turned another leaf and made a few notes. Half an hour.

Presently a rush downstairs; a flying figure in white

with straw hat and ribbons, May herself in colour and bloom bursting impetuous into the room.

"Oh, it shall never happen again, Greville. Never, I swear."

"It certainly never shall!" said he, placing his marker in the page and laying it down.

"Good Lord! What's gone with the coach?" cried Emma, running to the window.

"The coach is nearing Cavendish Square with an intimation to Romney that the sitting won't take place. And, though I did not mention it to Romney, no further sittings will take place unless I meet with a humble apology and very different conduct. What! is his valuable time to be wasted and mine also for your insufferable impertinence? Fie, Emma!"

She grew pale with angry emotion. Never was a face that more faithfully reflected her moods. She could not hide them if she would.

"What! you've sent the coach away for a few dirty minutes like that? You're a cruel man, so you are! And me that loves sitting for my pictures. I was doing the flowers to please you and this is my thanks. I'll have you know I'm not a slave if I *am* an unhappy girl that has to endure every kind of hard usage. You're a grand gentleman and I'm nothing, but I wouldn't treat you like that. I'll not see you again this day!"

She tore off her hat, her lawn cloak, and flung them on the floor. She dashed into the next room and tearing the flowers out of the vase flung them into the garden. Finally, upstairs with her like a whirlwind and Circe is heard to bang her door and lock it.

Greville, with the bell, serenely summons Mrs. Cadogan, curtseying and affrighted.

"Have the goodness to inform Mrs. Hart that I go to London and stay this night and possibly longer with her

Grace the Duchess of Argyll. I shall need no dinner until further notice."

He collects such possessions as he needs and departs with more than usual stateliness, and Mrs. Cadogan pounds upstairs the moment the door closes after him and rattles the handle of Circe's retreat.

"Let me in, Emy. 'Tis me, no one else. He's gone, more like an ice stature than a man. Oh, Emy, you'll pull down the house over our heads with your rages and follies. Let me in, I tell you. What man d'ye suppose will stand such tantrums, and you that owe him the very bread we eat. And little Emma the same!"

Silence. Mrs. Cadogan waxes eloquent at the key-hole.

"He's off to London to stay with his duchesses and the like and he'll want no dinner until he orders it again, and for all you know he'll never come back!"

"Let him stay away then!" says a muffled tragic voice, evidently from the depths of the pillow. "You won't need to fry the fish for dinner. That's all the difference."

"You fool, you!" says the pursy old lady outside and begins slowly to retreat to the stair-head, making her departure as noisy as possible that she may be recalled.

In a moment the door was open and Emma in crumpled white gown and loosened hair framed in it, a hand on either jamb.

"Where did he say he was going?"

"To some duchess. I don't know who. Yes, Gargyle, or something."

"Then I'm going out too. I shall go to Romney's. Give me the basket."

With furiously flushed cheeks, she began smoothing her hair and the rumples from her dress, a bitter sense of slighting contempt spurring her to defiance. She would not eat, would not delay, would have a hackney coach, and so off with her to Cavendish Square and Romney.

You are to imagine her entering that home of her delight with a softly falling footstep, for it came upon her always with the calm experienced in leaving busy streets behind and breathing the dim quiet of a church with shapes of silent beauty in jewelled window and faint gold, illuminated only by steadfast altar lights. This was her paradise, her church, for this girl of the people was a true believer of the religion of beauty; its priestess also, for she protested its creed in every lovely movement, in delicious voice and melting attitudes, and often winged hearts higher than they knew as they watched her. She was no priestess like the heavy-lidded women who served dark goddesses in Assyrian or Egyptian temples to snare men's souls in the bird-lime of the pit; yet, for all this, she brought men infallibly to her level when they loved her; dyed them, all but Greville, of her own colour, and whether that level was in the heights or the depths, let the reader judge as this history unrolls. Certainly, two, the greatest, thanked God they had known her, whatever the loud-mouthed world might say. And of these, one was Romney.

The studio was large, and full of light as clear and thin as water from the tall north window. He sat bending over a table with his back to her, as though making some sketch-note that had suddenly struck his fancy. He did not hear the door open, but when her foot touched the bare floor, he said without moving, "Emma! Come in, child," and went quietly on with his work.

She set down the little basket which carried cakes of her own making and butter and fresh eggs from the farm beyond the Green, and, coming up behind him, put her hand on his shoulder to see his dream shape itself on paper, until her hair brushed his ear. She knew well that as you never wake a child suddenly from sleep, so it must also be with such as Romney.

He took no heed of her—so deep was their harmony—

but with the hand on his shoulder, worked peacefully on.

It was herself, of course; for all that time, submerged in the loveliness and charm of her, he scarcely had another thought. He was making a study in wash for the Circe—the cave, the rocks, a hint of the gracious figure emerging like light from the womb of darkness; the chaotic beginning of the lovely world to be.

Not a word between them. The big old clock in the corner ticked solemnly, the silent figures on the easels pursued their dreams, the noise of traffic outside had sunk into a lulling murmur, and though she could no more have worded it than have flown, the eternal peace of Art stole into her heart and made her quarrel with Greville a transient impertinence. "You were born for better things than that," an inward voice said, coming from the quiet, and her very soul assented.

After awhile he pushed the paper away and looked up at her, his glance still dull with abstraction. A plain rugged face of strongly marked features and powerful jaw; the extinguished-looking eyes heavy with the melancholy that was to drown him later, and the mouth of the dreamer—whether in tone or colour—passionately sensitive as her own. Their eyes beheld each other a moment, and then hers dropped as she fell on her knees beside him, and put her head on his knee.

"Dear Mr. Romney, I'm ashamed of myself. I am, indeed. You make me what I should be, all beauty and wonder, scarce treading the earth, and I so far below it. Only this very morning I wasted your precious time and didn't come because of a miserable quarrel with Greville. You painted me as Serena, and I'm all tumult and folly; not worth your notice."

"Why, what's o'clock?" he asked, feeling for his big repeater. His dialect matched her own, for Romney too was a child of the people. "I didn't know, child; the time

went. Two hours late! Well, well, not wasted anyhow. It's shaping, it's shaping. Just stand there in front a minute, and put up your left arm—so!—arresting, commanding. You're a witch, reversing the spell that turned men into beasts. The other arm hangs down. Take my mahl-stick in your hand for a rod, pointing downwards, the magic gone out of it."

He looked at her a moment as she melted slowly into the attitude he desired. Instinctively she poised herself on the ball of the left foot, a pose of wonderful strength and lightness, the lifted hand arresting the pressing beasts.

"You lovely creature!" he said softly, with a kind of tender awe. Then, thinking aloud, went on, "No, but the face! Not right. Depress the chin a little; the eyes level and strong; but—no—I'll tell you the story. The woman in the goddess betrays her because her lover leaves her. She's frightened, for her own power means nothing to her beside him. He has conquered her, for all she's a goddess. The heavenly thing obeys the earthly, but with majesty. Can you do it?"

"I know," she cried, "I know!" and steadied like marble on the instant, her features composing themselves into calm. No sorrow, a solemn awe, a noble shame, a deep immortal regret that darkened the eyes and locked the lips in eternal silence; and so stood Divinity by the waters of oblivion she may not stoop to drink forever.

He looked at her, rapt, his hands idle on the table, absorbing her passionately. Not an eyelash flickered until he released her with a long sigh, and then, as it were, floated up to the surface of common things once more.

"There was never any one like you, never will be!" he said slowly. "You know, you feel without telling. You're the thing you seem. Who told a girl like you how goddesses look when they have lit on earth and find themselves betrayed?"

She smiled and shook her head. That was a secret to herself, but she knew her nature responsive as Æolian strings to a breeze; never a vibration passed over her from man or thing but waked its sister-echo in her heart.

"I think often you'd have been a great actress," he said in his slow way, as she got the papers off the table, laying them neatly on the ground to be replaced exactly in the same order. She went to the corner cupboard where he kept his loaf, set the kettle on the shabby little stove, and while it heated, fixed the saucepan beside it and got out her eggs and butter and cakes, and, full of deft housewifely cares, spread his scanty cups and spoons on the table, and made ready the little meal for two; and put the teapot on and the steaming eggs, and so set him down and herself beside him and was ready for talk.

He watched her, fascinated. Those studio meals were not infrequent and always they were his delight. He was to remember them with an ache nothing could cure when she had taken her beauty and kindness to a land strange and far, where she was the adored of many but to none the star of hope, the golden Dawn she had become to him. But to-day was to-day, and the future veiled, and he smiled as she pulled up the cracked chair, too uncertain for his weight, and perched herself on the edge.

"Two eggs for each of us!" says she. "And those cakes, Mr. Romney, they're fine! We got the recipe, mother and me, from an old Scotchie that came from Edinburgh. They just melt in your mouth as crisp as fritters. And then I'll mend that hole in your sleeve if you'll slip off your coat. And I'll tell you my troubles."

The soothing sunshine of her presence! He ate mechanically at first and then with keen enjoyment. Indeed, the little saucepan went on again, but this time for scrambled eggs with a flick of the sauce he kept to season

his daily mutton chop when time failed him for the chop-house.

"Food for the gods!" he called it, and left the plate so clean that she declared she might almost spare herself the trouble to wash it up. And then she whipped off his coat and set to with her needle.

"There's never a thing you do but what makes a picture!" he said with eyes that could not be satisfied. "Now—the way you sit, the light falling on the curls above your ear—ah, well! The troubles, child, the troubles. What are they?"

"My temper, as usual," says she, stitching for dear life. "Mr. Romney, I can scarce look you in the face for fear you'll despise the fool that can govern herself no more than a child. I do improve—God knows I try hard enough—but still 'twill out when Greville or another vexes me, even though I know I pull down my shelter with my own hands. And for nothing that matters a brass farthing! To-day I was late and he flung it in my face, any man would, and I must needs answer back, and off he went to his grand friends."

Watching, he saw a tear splash on the brass button of his coat, but said nothing. He let her unpack her heart.

"I often fear it won't last forever." Her voice was quivering now. "For it's three years, and that's a long time for a man's heart though but a day to a woman's. He said, when we began, that he never knew a woman clever enough to keep a man that was tired of her. Mr. Romney, is he tired of me?"

Down went the coat on her knee, and two swimming eyes invited his judgment as that of heaven, two trembling hands extended to receive sentence.

"Child, how can I tell?" the Mentor answered tenderly. "To me it seems that your infinite variety mocks the very word *tire*, but indeed I know not these men of fashion

who love themselves so well that there's but little room for a woman's face in their heart. But you should not vex him without cause. Greville loves his ease. Even my bat's eyes can see that far. But that he can throw such a jewel away I'll never credit till I see it."

She shook her head disconsolate.

"I'm the most ungrateful girl on earth. I know it. Sure he sent me to the sea and I ill, when he was off to his uncle's new estates at Milford. And he let me have little Emma with me, and not a grumble out of him over my bills, which was wonderful indeed, though heaven knows I kept them as low as low! And yet in spite of it, I can't always hold my miserable tongue, though I love him with all my heart and soul and shall forever."

"And you that I thought was modelling yourself on Serena in the poem!" said Romney, with the ghost of a smile. "I don't think you'll ever rival that lady, somehow, and for my part I don't wholly wish you should. But Greville likes ease, and to see his pupil do him honour. Teaching and lecturing's his master passion and every time you kick over the traces you disparage his own method to him. That's more than half the trouble."

"I know, I know! And, sure, to please God and Greville is my only aim. Oh, Mr. Romney, if we could see a little ahead, if we could know what's coming! He'll turn his poor Emma off one day, and then—"

"Then she'll know there's a man smudges paint on canvas would rather starve than she should want! But I think better of Greville's discrimination. You sit down here presently and write him a pretty letter, and I'll send it to the big house he's at, and it will bring him back tomorrow. But don't anger him again. What is it but to stick a knife in your own breast?"

She told him he was right, and resumed her stitching, and he watched her with his heart in his eyes—his divine

lady, his child, his muse; all and one, and more that he could never put in words. If Laura possesses Petrarch, and Dante, Beatrice, to the end of time, so most surely does Emma possess the man who will not let her die, who with strong magic caught and fixed ghost after ghost of her beauty upon canvas to make the world eternally her lover.

When he resumed the coat and she had gravely considered the effect, head on one side appraising, she got his pen and paper, and sat down to her task. She wrote with ease now, and though the spelling was still deplorable the hand was no worse than many a woman of quality's.

She had been strongly moved that day, always indeed strongly moved herself with the picture of her griefs, and as she wrote the tears were so thick in her eyes that the letters swam before them.

"O my dearest Greville, don't think on my past follies, think on my good, little as it has been. O Greville, when I think on your goodness, your tender kindness, my heart is so full of gratitude that I want words to express it. But I have one happiness in view, which I am determined to practice, and that is evenness of temper. For endead I have thought so much of your amiable goodness when you have been tried to the utmost that I will, endead I will manege myself and try to be like Greville. There is nothing like bying expearance. O Greville, think on me with kindness. Think on how many happy days weeks and years—I hope—we may yett pass. And endead, did you know how much I love you, you woud freely forgive me any passed quarrels. I have done nothing but think of you since, and O Greville, did you but know when I so think, what thoughts, what tender thoughts, you would say 'Good God, and can Emma have such feeling sensibility? No, I never coud think it. But now I may hope to

bring her to conviction, and she may prove a valluable and amiable whoman!' True, Greville, and you shall not be disappointed. I will be everything you can wish."

Her own pathos had moved her to such a pitch by this time that she could write no more and was forced to borrow Romney's handkerchief to dry her streaming eyes before she could sign and fold the letter.

"It's all true, every word of it, and I don't expect ever to be happy more, but, oh, Mr. Romney, did you but know how *good* I feel at this moment!" said she, when the missive was despatched. "Never, never can I so burst out again. 'Tis the blessed quiet in this dear place that aids me, and your friendly presence. And now I must go. Wish me forgiven, for without his love life is death to me and I would not ask to draw another breath."

She meant it to the full and her sweet face was like Congreve's "Mourning Bride," until by good fortune, as Romney took her to the door to call a coach for her, a Punch and Judy show came along the square, and she must needs delay to see the antics, and very shortly was crying for laughter as whole-heartedly as she had cried upstairs for sorrow.

The little crowd laughed with her, she leading with abandon that would have driven Greville mad had he seen it, and Romney laughing behind her with joy to see her cheered. Those two children of the people were much at home with each other and with the people. Punch never held a merrier assembly. As she turned finally to go Romney called her back a moment.

"Gavin Hamilton was here this morning and told me he hears Sir William's coming back from Naples to see to the estates his wife left him. You may as well tell Greville, in case it's news to him."

She assented lightly, never guessing that Destiny, with

the smile ironic masked in triviality, was at her heels again, and went off to Edgware Row at last gay as a lark and confident of forgiveness; sure in this happy world all must be well; and Greville would be pleased to know his uncle was coming. No censorious uncle he, but a sympathetic friend and with an eye for beauty keen as Greville's own. She promised herself an unbending elderly admirer. Romney remained alone to think of her angelic kindness and dear ways, and to touch and retouch his sketch while the light lasted. He went forth then to his solitary chop-house. As for herself, Greville was still sternly absent on her return, but her good consoling mother had made a comfortable little roast of lamb for supper and jam tarts to follow, and if the evening was not perfect bliss, at least it was mighty endurable, and the jam tarts excellent to the appetite of twenty healthy years.

CHAPTER V

THE RIFT

THE letter reached Greville at the stately house of her Grace the Duchess of Argyll and was delivered into his hand as he sat with two ladies so beautiful at their different ages that Paris might sooner have devoured his apple, gold though it was, than run the risk of mistake in awarding it to one or the other.

And lest it be believed that the romancer dresses all his ladies in rainbow glories, I point out that the elder was the famous Elizabeth Gunning—the double Duchess, as they called her—who had risen from direst poverty by the victorious attack of her loveliness on the embattled world, to be successively Duchess of Hamilton and Duchess of Argyll, and the younger was Mrs. Crewe, that most fashionable of all beauties, of whom it was said (in a world which knew not Emma!) that she alone equalled or excelled the perfections of Elizabeth Gunning in the days when she took the town by storm; a sweet, sleepy-eyed beauty, gentle persuasion in every look, and a little delicate malice to season the honey with ginger.

The ladies were dressed for a Court and were splendid in satins and jewels. Greville, very much at home in that house, was festooning a chain of diamonds to better advantage about Mrs. Crewe's shoulders when the letter made its appearance, the Duchess commenting on his fine taste.

"There's no man I know like you for taste, Greville," says her gracious Grace. "The Hamiltons are like that.

How is it you pick up all these notions? No wonder you're fastidious."

He put the letter carefully in his pocket with a spasm of anger that she should dare pursue him there, and stood back to view his work.

"Mrs. Crewe sets it off even better than she did the other fashion. As to my taste, 'tis formed on the antique, and what I've done is by no means original. Thus the Roman Empress Faustina disposed her jewels to catch the eyes of her gladiator lovers when she wearied of her philosophic husband! Ah, madam, are not women the same in all ages?"

"They suit themselves to the men, who also don't change, for all I see. And if the Emperor was as dull as our philosophers to-day, I excuse her Majesty." Thus the Duchess.

"One may be dull without the excuse of philosophy to advertise it," replied Mrs. Crewe at the mirror, looking at her long swan's throat, glorious with diamonds. "Do but think of the Duke of Devonshire. It gives me an indigestion to look at him. It runs in families. 'Tis because Mr. Greville is half Hamilton that he's such highly instructive company."

She shot a little ironic glance at him from under long lashes. The lady knew very well that here was one who "could gaze without madness on Amoret's eyes"—eyes which had settled the fate of not lovers only but of more than one contested election, for she had but to smile upon the happy voters and they were won. Greville hated political women, and she knew it. Hence the little scratch, a pat with velvet paw. But he was stirred to discomfort nevertheless, for Mrs. Crewe was a thermometer for measuring the liking of society, and had a smile graduated to its exact temperature. Could it be possible the great

world began to find him a little tedious, a little *arrièré?* He was born older than any of them to begin with and had relished a fossil when others were gambling, tripping and soaking, and it was not always easy to conceal that their amusements palled on him. And for the last three years he had permitted himself to drop rather more into obscurity with his delightful pupil than his reason could approve. She was troublesome sometimes, but yet her amazing progress in the graces and accomplishments she owed him and the masters he provided was a daily amusement and interest. And the little house in Edgware Row was absolute comfort. The dish, chosen by himself, and cooked perfectly to his taste, suited his liking and health better than the sumptuous banquets of the great houses, and Emma's company, which required no tip-toe courtesy or courting, allowed him to stand at ease in a way impossible with the fashionable ladies who welcomed him, perhaps a shade more coldly than formerly. But—if he were dropping out? To be forgotten is a much less easy process than forgetting, and Mr. Greville must be received with acclaim wherever he deigned to show himself. Was his season slipping by? He winced. She was not worth it. No! not a day, not an hour should she stand in his light if he were once persuaded of that. And economize as she would, still his taste for the antique led him into irretrievable expense. That matter, too, was becoming urgent.

He must control his tendency to pontificate. Sir William had warned him of it once half jesting—Sir William, who was twenty years younger for all the remorseless parish register.

He broke up his collegiate calm into smiles on the very fear of disapproval, and executed a little adoration of Mrs. Crewe, yet not enough to compel the Duchess to re-

call her own age. They discussed the company to appear at the Court, and Mrs. Crewe flung another softly feathered dart.

"Miss Middleton will be there," says she. "I met Lady Middleton this afternoon—a woman I swallow with difficulty. She detained me a whole ten minutes to hear the story of the latest heart Miss Middleton has strung with the other scalps at her girdle. 'A most desirable prospect, my dear'—she mimicked the proud mother—'wealth, devotion; everything but family. The father is Wade, the successful Irish merchant.' Lord! says I, what signifies family nowadays? If money is not worth a little wading in the mud, what is?"

Greville laughed to hide discomfort. He knew perfectly well what was in the air. He, the fastidious, the condescending, had distinguished Miss Middleton with languid attentions. Of all the heiresses he had scanned during the past three years, she appeared the most desirable, and marriage with her the least unpleasant alternative. And the so-called friends of his circle knew this perfectly and waited expectant, though it would be decidedly more amusing (they owned) to see the gold cup slip from his lip and my fastidious gentleman left in the lurch, if the luck should turn that way.

"I dine there to-morrow and shall hear the news," he said easily. "Lord, how well you mimic Lady Middleton, madam! Had she no more news for you?"

"Not that will interest you, sir. Why, yes, now I think of it! I had forgot, but no doubt you know it. She said she had met Gavin Hamilton, suddenly back from Italy, and he told her Sir William will be returning shortly. His wife's death two years ago has given him things to look into here. But no doubt you know this."

"I shall by next mail, madam, but not yet. Very likely Gavin has a letter in hand for me."

"'Twill be agreeable to see Sir William again," said the Duchess. "I ever liked him best of my Hamilton relations. He will be well received at Court too. The King never forgets his foster brother."

She alluded to the fact that Lady Archibald Hamilton, Sir William's mother, had been *maîtresse en titre* to Frederick, Prince of Wales, George III's father, a circumstance which had much advantaged Sir William in life.

"I know no one with more agreeable manners," she added. "In society he has all the graces of a young man, and yet the savants are at home with him. I hope with all my heart he finds a charming wife awaiting him in England. He wants an Ambassadress in that big villa in Naples, and I know no man who could make a more agreeable husband to a sensible woman. He can't expect to find a saint like your late aunt, Greville, but not many women would refuse a man of his temper. Indeed, I have one in my mind—"

Greville, quivering with uneasiness, begged to hear the name, but she shook her head, laughing.

"No, no. These things are spoiled if told, but I shall throw them together with all the art I can muster."

"What her Grace decrees is done!" Mr. Greville said, bowing gallantly. "My uncle will be infinitely indebted."

He waited until the ladies graciously dismissed him, and then betook himself to his club, so lost in thought that Emma's letter lay totally forgotten in his pocket.

Sir William coming home! Certainly he would be glad personally, but yet the thought was full of unpleasant possibilities. He sat down in a quiet corner as far removed from acquaintances as possible, and classified his thoughts in his own methodic manner.

Lady Hamilton, his aunt, was now two years dead, and in one sense Greville had never since known a perfectly unanxious moment. A saint, as the Duchess said so

lightly, she had much to complain of in her gay husband's gaieties, yet never had complained but bore all with an undeviating sweetness. But he was not the man to be spurred to any emulation by sainthood and in his own heart half blamed her piety for forcing him to seek outside recreation.

It was even more easily found in Naples than elsewhere and especially in a political backwater, as it was at that time, which left even an Ambassador of Great Britain much at a loss to fill up the lazy delicious days of sweet do-nothingness. But there were plenty to help him; a charming and artistic English society; wandering sirens (like my Lady Craven, the delight and ridicule of Horace Walpole) too numerous and worthless to be listed. Nay, it was whispered that the Queen herself, Marie Caroline, sister of the unhappy Marie Antoinette of France, had found Sir William more agreeable than even ambassadors are wont to be to the sovereigns to whom they are accredited.

And this state of affairs suited Greville excellently well. He was attached to his uncle and wished him amusement in all sincerity. His own position was secure in Sir William's marriage, for it was childless, and Lady Hamilton, his aunt, so deeply attached to himself that with Sir William's own affection his certainty of heirship to all the couple had to leave was complete. Indeed, Sir William spoke of it openly and gave Greville leave to mention it as a settled fact to any careful father whose heiress he might ask in marriage. And then Lady Hamilton died.

It was a disagreeable shock to Greville in more ways than one. Sir William, little over fifty, handsome, pleasing in the highest degree, hospitable, open-handed, was once more in the market—but there needs no expatiation. The case speaks for itself. And now he was returning to London, the high position of an ambassadress in his hand

to offer, the loveliest land on earth as a home, and the rumour of a queen's love to intensify his fascinations. Why, what young fellow in London could stand against him and his court favour? He would be married and done for, and a little heir next year and more to follow, and he, Greville, would sink into a young-elderly neglected man about town, too poor to keep up with the great steeplechase of fashion, unless—

Unless? Two things. A rich marriage for himself, and decorous or indecorous widowerhood for Sir William. He knew the town quite well enough to know that his chances of the first were diminished instantly an inclination of his uncle's to marriage became known. Then what and where was the solution of the difficulty? Miss Middleton? That subject next passed in review. He knew that his advances had not been too warmly received, and though it was incredible that any rumour of the Edgware Row establishment could disturb Lord Middleton's mind, women took fanciful views and a whisper in Lady or Miss Middleton's ear might have done much harm there. He began to feel very strongly that Emma was a disadvantage, that he had been drifting, that if he desired a wealthy marriage he must return to a handsome house in London and bury himself and his advantages no longer in obscurity. In short, that he must make a complete change in his life. To this must be added the fact that he felt he had amply redeemed his pledges to Emma, and that, though she had become a delightful household companion in many ways, her temper was still troublesome; her tastes, through all the veneer, still apt to be unexpectedly coarse in grain here and there; and last, but far from least, that even such beauty may pall, and that he began to be somewhat tired of her.

Of course there would be difficulties with Emma, serious ones, but here he by no means despaired. His own calm

good sense and Sir William's counsel would carry him through and dispose of her comfortably. All justice should be done her short of the unreason of injuring his own career.

This was a matter which he could discuss freely with Sir William and there could be no doubt what his advice would be. The means were the only difficult question, and those could be arranged if two men of experience put their heads together.

All this dismissed, he took out her letter and read it carefully. It did not move him. He thought her bursts of repentance as facile as her tempers. The fact was, and he often reproached her for it, she had too much imagination, and, to Greville, imagination was the last folly, almost the last crime. It meant the unpleasant faculty of seeing things as they are not, of exaggerating every emotion, of leaving the straight highway of fact for endless and perplexing aerial flights that ended in cloud-land and involved unpleasant drops to earth, and bruised every relation in life hopelessly. If she had but plodding good sense Emma would be irresistible. Alas, no!—she would not be Emma.

He tore the letter into small bits for the waste-paper basket, disposed of it, and entered into easy talk with an acquaintance. He would not go home. She needed a lesson and should have it.

As a matter of fact, he neither returned nor wrote for a week, and Emma was seriously frightened. The excuse was simple enough, a letter from Sir William announcing his return and asking Greville to attend to some business connected with his Welsh estates. It could have been done as well from Edgware Row, but for the need of administering a sound lesson, but Greville always pursued his settled way without flinching. Also, there was a dinner at the Middletons.

She was in a state of abject submission when he got back, pale with watching. Indeed, but for Romney's upholding and the certainty which he gained for her that Greville was still in town, she would have been inclined to tear through the streets to find him anywhere, anyhow, and it took all Romney's persuasion to induce her to wait quietly.

She sank into a chair pale and sighing, as he entreated her—a deep patient sigh. She was A Forsaken Lady in Dejection at the moment, with drooped head and hanging hands.

"Ah, Mr. Romney, this is the reward for a most tender and passionate love. You know how I have given my whole heart, my whole life; and no woman ever did this but met her reward in cruelty."

"I thought," says Romney, blundering, "that you owed him much kindness. Could you not, my dear, fix your mind on that rather than on anger which you yourself owned deserved t'other day, and which I am certain will soon pass?"

"Kindness!" she cried, the blood flowing crimson into lips and cheeks with a sudden return to energy. "Kindness? That's the way a huckster would calculate it. Food, clothes, and lessons—lessons that I might sing and draw for his diversion. That's his kindness! And I've given him in return beauty not thought despicable, and the love and tender devotion of a true heart. When he had an oppression on the chest, didn't I poultice him and sit up near a week till I looked like a hag of thirty? Didn't I cook his broths with my own hands and wouldn't let my mother touch 'em; didn't I run his errands and fetch and carry and sweep his room and—"

She flung up her arms with an inspired gesture as she poured on and became a denouncing goddess. Romney stared at her all unconscious of the words, seeing only

the Juno look, the offended majesty of the noble attitude. What did it matter what she said so long as she could look like that? He snatched charcoal and paper, and began with swift lines to perpetuate the pose.

Enraged, she darted on the helpless man and seized the paper and tore it across, glaring at him, a beautiful Fury.

"You too!" she cried. "Where's your sympathy? I that have sat for you hundreds of times and you never asked if I was weary, not so much as once. Men are all the same; a woman's not flesh and blood to feel and suffer, she's but a pastime or a slave; or a dog to be driven from the door. Oh, the cruel, hateful world! Some day I'll stick a knife into my heart and make an end of it."

Here a sob sent her back to the first pose because she could no longer orate comfortably. She sank again into her chair, and Romney, all trembling sympathetic fear, put out his delicate fibrous hand and clutched hers softly yet strongly, and yearned over her and consoled her with clumsy tenderness and bid her take courage, for though Greville could never, never love her as he loved his child, his inspiration, yet no man having tasted her beauty could ever cast his eye on another. She herself was her security.

"But go back," he entreated, "and vex him no more, my beloved lady. For sure it only recoils on yourself. For my part, I can love Greville because he brought you to me and so flooded my life with sunshine. 'Tis my belief that one day he'll marry you if you do but govern yourself. Now be good and go home to be there when he comes, as I swear he will and must."

So he coaxed and wheedled her and got her back to the normal and into a hackney coach, and so saw her depart; and not an hour too soon, for Greville came back that day, and if all had not been ready for him it would have been a coolness to start with.

But all was in apple-pie order, and she so sweetly humble, with her white dress and soft submissive eyes, that what could he do but open his arms and forgive her, and the more readily because the room was perfumed with flowers, a *blanquette* of veal done to perfection for his dinner, with a morsel of fine old cheese to follow and a glass of Sir William's fine sparkling Burgundy to finish with the biscuits. And Mrs. Cadogan had been at her polishing, and the silver on the table (for Mr. Greville could eat in nothing meaner) was black velvet in the bowls of the spoons and curves of the dish, and the glass sparkled like frost crystals to the summer sunshine outside; and when Emma had cleared the table, mellowed with comfort, he cried.

"I'll take you to Ranelagh for an evening's enjoyment. Put on your prettiest gown and your blue hat, and my girl shall see the world and the world see her."

She flew upstairs, when the time came, all fire and joy, for this was a rare treat and proved her fully restored to favour. It was the golden sceptre extended to the fainting Esther. It cannot be said she made herself beautiful, for God had done that for her once and for all, but Greville exclaimed at her charming air as she came downstairs in a considered hat that made her eyes look dark azure and her cheeks pink carnations. Mrs. Cadogan, too, clasped her hands in delight and, being accommodated with a glass of port, watched them smiling out of sight.

Yet it had been better if that enchanting pleasure had never been embarked on, for look what happened!

Ranelagh, dim and beautiful save where earthly lights matched their rose and golden jewels against the silver flood of moonlight; Ranelagh, with shy secret walks where beauties far from shy might wander with happy lovers and exchange a perilous kiss ere they came upon another pair similarly engaged round the corner; Ranelagh, with

gay little tables set in open boxes so brilliantly lit that here the moonlight was vanquished and a torrent of rainbow light poured upon the handsomest toilettes available and the bright eyes and laughing lips of the London ladies.

They toured the gardens with all the discretion of a long married couple observing the indiscretions of less fortunate people, and Greville turned a neat point or two for her consideration as to the good breeding of reserve in public, and then having engaged a box for supper, left her, thinking he caught sight of the artist Gavin Hamilton and resolved to introduce him to the Secret Beauty and have the usual congratulations on his good fortune. Who but Emma! Giddy with the lights and music, the just finished song of the prima donna of the evening, the softly muted notes of the string orchestra, she sat well forward in the box to survey the passing crowd in its gay kaleidoscope of colour. She leaned her arms on the edge, she turned her face this way and that, looking for Greville, wondering what kept him, and fully conscious that many faces turned in her direction, and men and women alike looked up at the lovely stranger—alone, equivocal, surely approachable! At least it could be hoped so. The orchestra struck up again, this time in the gay strain "Batti, batti," her last lesson, her latest triumph. Heavens, what a coincidence! Irresistible! Leaning out still, she began to sing, softly at first, terrified at her own daring and the listening faces, then louder, clearer, clearer, as the conductor caught the bright soprano and, beckoning the orchestra with his stick, sent them back to the accompaniment. Instantly she saw his intention and sprang to her feet on the impulse, ardent and flushed. She that had never sung with an orchestra before! She whose sole audience had been Greville, Romney, her master, or a chance friend. And now, now, London was listening, or so it seemed to her excited fancy. She could

hear her own voice mounting, soaring divinely in the delicious music. Louder, louder, clearer, clearer, sure that silver note touched the very stars, and the people were still as death to hear this new nightingale and the orchestra softened and softened to give her room, and—Greville returned.

On the last phrase, and as the listeners broke out in thunders of clapping, he returned, little guessing what voice embroidered the night with silver. And as he looked at the box it was Emma, crimsoning to the plaudits, bowing as though to the manner born, her fair hands crossed on her heart.

In a pale fury that subdued him to the utmost deliberation he walked into the box and beckoned her to come to the back.

"Let us instantly go away," said he.

Conscious of her enormities, she faltered.

"Did I do wrong, Greville? I didn't know. I thought to see you pleased with my success."

"Pleased!" Not another word did he utter. Supper was served and he cast not a glance upon it, but paid the bill and walked out with Emma trembling at his heels, leaving who would to eat it.

It was a descent from such Olympian dignity that later he must needs explain how she had erred, for it was impossible for her to see it without assistance. To her it was as natural to break into song as it is to a bird, and enchanting to enchant others. What? Surely God made beautiful voices and beautiful faces for the common joy. "And I knew I could do it better than Ceritelli!" she added, quaking.

"You acted with your usual want of consideration—your usual lack of taste and breeding." His words were drops of sleet on a hot cheek. "It convinces me, what I have long since thought, that there is not nor ever can

be any community of feeling between us. I have trained you now for near four years, and yet the moment I leave you you can expose yourself to the public view in a place where any woman with a rag of decency left must be circumspect. And there you draw every eye upon you and make yourself a spectacle for every coarse fellow or bad woman that cares to look and listen. If your own good feeling don't show you the horror of such a proceeding I may talk for ever in vain. So I shall say no more. I despair of you."

Later, when cowed, she besought his forgiveness, he accorded it dangerously.

"I forgive you because you are so coarse in fibre that you can never learn. I do but waste breath. It is not your fault; after a fashion. Yes. I forgive you. But to say that I can forget is impossible. These things shape my view of your character, in which I own myself mistaken from the beginning."

She dared say no more, and the episode passed into silence, but it is not too much to say that from that hour Emma's fate was fixed, though her lord and master would take his own time to announce his decision. And as little did she think as he that Sir William Hamilton, whose coming now drew near, was to be the very arbiter of that fate.

CHAPTER VI

THE FAIR TEA MAKER

Emma had cause to realize how deeply she had offended, during the next few days, for Greville assumed what she called his touch-me-not manner and was coldly polite and distant. She dreaded that attitude with all her soul for she knew neither what alienation it covered nor how to meet it. In the class from which she sprang politeness is not uncommonly the herald of fury, and she was always in expectation of a devastating hurricane which never had come as yet but was surely due one day if she could not control herself, and control herself she could not. It was impossible for her to understand why the kiss-and-be-friends reconciliation should not immediately follow a quarrel, for she "bore no malice" herself, and could not imagine why any one else should do so. She had no way of understanding the cleavage, the deep settled distaste and alienation which her outbreaks produced in a man like Greville. To him vulgarity and want of taste were more unpardonable than the fracture of any commandment of the ten, and in his cool review of Emma the fact that she had so much taste, and all of it so bad, set them universes apart.

Beauty, economy, an oddly consorted pair, pleaded alike for Emma in the calm rationalism of Greville's mind. He knew very well he would not meet that impassioned loveliness elsewhere—loveliness that might so easily walk in satin and jewels, but for his sake contented itself with dimity and a little gold chain stringing a miniature of himself. And he knew also that never, never again would

his needs be met with such comfortable economy, and never again a cook like Mrs. Cadogan be at his service without a salary that must bulk largely in his carefully kept accounts. And yet, he was certain he was nearing the end of his tether and could not endure the connection much longer.

Emma loved him passionately, tenderly, and that was but an aggravation of the offense, for if a man cares no longer for a woman her love is the last unbearable burden. *She* cannot realize her love as any other than a precious gift which common gratitude must repay with tenderness; she will not, cannot understand that it has in it a touch of the revolting to the man who desires her no longer. The immortal Don Juan seeking the rainbow beauty always in the next field or on the dim horizon, confident of finding her sooner or later, whispers in every man's ear to have done with this threadbare passion and find happiness in the next soft bosom that the Eternal Feminine eternally offers—a field away, no more.

And at this time Miss Middleton's quiet coldness and perfect restraint of manner were contrasting almost daily with Emma's floridity of speech and over-emphasis of every gesture and attitude; or so it seemed to him. For Greville possessed even to an extreme that fastidiousness which is a kind of austerity in men who, having no austerity in morals, stress it the more in taste. He required that women should be virginal in allure though not in physical response, that they should be shy, cool, with a frozen delicate sweetness to be melted difficultly by the most polished approaches, and then enfolding the white snowdrop blossom in green leaves even from a favoured lover or husband. Such was Miss Middleton as far as he could judge. But Emma, all tropical perfumed luxuriance, expanding a warm bosom to lavish sunlight, repelled him. He was incapable of responding to such advances

even in the first gust of possession. There was far too much nature in her, whereas he wanted a woman drilled by careful mother, school-mistress and dancing-master to the last perfection of self-restraint for the sake of the adored; a dainty figure of hoops and brocade in the costliest porcelain, and as cold. Nature itself must be hooped, stay-laced, and set on high heels before he could at all respect such an earth-smelling goddess.

Therefore Emma's advances for pardon and love did but increase his discontent. What he really would have chosen would be to retain the invaluable Mrs. Cadogan and let the divine lady go, so oddly are some of us constituted. But as the way to this was not clear at present he merely chilled Emma with coldest reserve and waited on events.

"Can you *never* forgive me, Greville?" she said wistfully one morning, leaning over his chair after clearing away the breakfast china, and setting a bowl of red roses at his elbow, as he read a catalogue of antiques. He wore a dressing-gown of lavender silk with faint French flowering and looked unapproachably aloof and distinguished in his great chair. He turned a leaf calmly. As Romney had remarked with much shrewdness, the most unforgivable offense was that Emma had now lived with him for more than three years and yet had absorbed so little of his teaching and the high example he set her of nature discouraged with cool forms and ceremonies. The very word *nature* was disagreeable to Greville and the thing itself, exemplified under his nose every moment, was rapidly becoming unbearable.

"Forgiveness is scarcely the word," he answered without raising his eyes. "I am not in the least angry with you, if that is your meaning. I merely feel that your and my dispositions are worlds apart. Exhibitions which give you pleasure to me appear odious, vulgar, revolting.

Would you have the kindness to draw the curtain a little over the right window? The breeze comes in too strongly."

She obeyed, lingering.

"Greville, do you think you see *no* improvement in me to repay you for all the trouble you've taken?"

Now he laid down his paper, leaned his head back and surveyed her.

"No, I should not say that. You were uneducated and ignorant three years ago. You could sing a ballad with the vigour that nature gives—a poor allowance, by the way. Now your voice is trained in the Italian style, and, though you have hard work before you still, you can please the connoisseur. Your drawing-master speaks well of you, and Romney commended the landscapes you have lately attempted. You read expressively, if the subject is not beyond you. I have been pleased to see you reading Hayley's "Triumphs of Temper," from which you can certainly take a needful lesson. Your manners are excessively improved. You have laid aside the romping hoyden. I have seen you enter a room like a lady. You have certainly a taste for simple becoming dress, and—"

The praise was too much, too unexpected. She was at his knees in an instant.

"Then you're pleased! Oh, dear, dear Greville! Then you love me? You know I tried to please my own Greville? Your poor Emma has not failed?"

Her sparkling, glowing face adored him. He continued with discouraging serenity.

"In these respects, though you still need much tuition, you have not failed. But what I aimed at, beyond all, was character. I wished to make you valued and respected. And *there* there is no improvement. You are utterly unrestrained, and so far as I am a judge will never have the secure future I hope for you."

"What, Greville, not with you, who know, who pity me?

Think what I was. Oh, consider! A poor village girl, and London, and men—oh, consider, I beseech you, what chance had I? Sure the faults in me were as little to be helped as my want of book-learning. And I will cure them! Don't you *see* me try?"

She caught his hand and fondled it passionately against her panting bosom. He drew it away with reserve.

"This is exactly what I complain of. Always in extremes, making scenes, overstraining feelings, raving, an exaggerated sensibility. If you could but know its indecency, how it repels! But you cannot know. You never will. I abandon the thankless task. One question: Have I not told you *never* to refer to that abominable past? Who ever heard Mrs. Wells drag these unpleasant subjects into the light of day?"

"Mrs. Wells," repeated Emma, and was hopelessly silent. Then, with the utter want of tact she showed with Greville, must needs pester him further, though timidly.

"But if you taught me all these things, Greville, was I not to make use of them? Where was I to display them? Sure the time has come that you will wish me to show off some of what I have learnt and—"

"Show off!" he echoed, with a scorn to which words are inadequate. She still knelt, baffled.

"Pray get up and sit down, and let us change the subject. You have good sense of a sort, Emma, when it serves your own turn. I expect Sir William Hamilton here this afternoon, and I do most earnestly hope that for the credit of my taste there may be no outbursts in his presence. His good opinion is of consequence to me and I would not have him think I have wasted three years on one I assured him I had such high hopes of."

The poor Emma was humbled to the earth by this time. Her terror of Sir William combined with her love for Greville made her an easy victim.

"I promise," she said in the measured tones which she knew he approved. "I will try to get a victory over myself and seem to be happy though miserable, for miserable I must be, Greville, if your heart does not approve me."

He uttered a word of encouragement and returned into his paper.

Behold the parlour prepared for the great, the expected guest at the hour for tea; the neatly curtained windows open to admit a scented breeze from the garden; Emma's bowl of roses on the centre table; the precious silhouette of Greville in its black frame on the mantelpiece; Romney's fine drawing of Emma in sepia and wash as a wistful-eyed "Solitude" exploring far horizons, above it; the chairs plump and cushioned for respected backs; the carpet soft and harmoniously coloured; and a charming table of Sheraton workmanship spread with finest damask and thin glittering silver beside the cups of egg-shell porcelain. A delightful room though small, for everything about Greville must be delicate and elegant, be it where it would. He had gone into London to fetch Hamilton, and Emma, afraid to move so much as a chair after the arrangements had met his approval, hovered between kitchen and parlour to annoy Mrs. Cadogan with fears and comments. Had Watts sent the fresh butter? The cream?

"You'd have heard of it if he hadn't, girl, since 'twas you ordered it. Here it is, yellow as buttercups and sweeter. Put it in yon big silver milk jug, Emma. And look, here's the strawberries, beauties, right British Queens if I know anything. Carry in the dish. Here, girl, stop. Put them leaves about them so they'll peep out between with their fat red cheeks. Now, ain't that pretty? And now the bread and butter."

"The cake, mother. Is it good?"

"Good? You just smell to it. A pound of everything,

and as rich as rich. And look at the Lisbon biscuits. You could all but blow them away. And I made a few ham sandwiches in case his Lordship was hungry after the ride out. Look, Emma, as pink as a dog's tongue, and never a better ham was cut. I think it's as well to have the orange cordial I made the winter before. Put it in a corner handy with the glasses. And now run up and dress yourself real pretty."

She did her utmost before the looking-glass bunched with muslin and pink ribbons, and then went slowly down for her mother's verdict.

"Will I do?"

"Do?" Mrs. Cadogan stood with arms akimbo on comfortable haunches and took a liberal survey. "Why, yes. Your hair's beautiful. I don't know as I ever saw you do it better. My, what a wheat stack of it you've got! I like that blue ribbon tied above your ear. 'Tis uncommon. White musling always suits you. Now turn about and I'll pull out the bows of your sash. There, that's it. Now you go in and sit down quiet, and be pretty-behaved to His Lordship, and may be he'll leave Greville his fortune and then he'll marry you and I'll see you a lady yet."

These were comfortable prophecies and always tilted Emma's spirits, for she shared her mother's easy-going optimism. But now she went slowly into the parlour, and stood on a chair to have a last look in the fine oval mirror Greville had set so tantalizingly high, then rearranged the tea-table and finally sat down by the window. Hope was not kind to her to-day. She was really dreadfully uneasy. Greville's manner of late had much undermined her confidence, and supposing Sir William should share his disapproval—supposing Greville on the way out should "set him against" her—what was to become of her?

She could hear the rattle of wheels far down the road.

and her heart beat violently. She started to the window. No, only old Dr. Whyte of the Manor returning from the Bank. Lord, what a fright for nothing! Wheels again, a fresh alarm, and Emma behind the curtain, fixed, scarcely breathing. Yes, yes, at last. The coach came on, bearing her fate unseen within it, and pulled up with a flourish at the door. One second she watched to see Greville leap out, followed by a tall man of slight, extremely elegant figure, and then, with a rush she was back in her chair again with the book on her lap. No—no, that was too studied, that would never do. They *must* know she had heard them coming. She rose, considered, shook out her skirts, and advanced with sedate sweetness to the little hall and as Greville opened the door she stood there modestly and gravely composed to welcome them. Instinct had served her rightly. It was perfection's self.

Sir William followed and through the open door the daylight came with him and the summer scents of the garden. He saw before him a quiet girl in white and blue ribbons with a pink rose stuck in the fichu that crossed her bosom. Extremely young, fair and fresh as a posy of primroses she seemed in the half light of the hall. That was the first impression—innocence, youthful grace, a shy gentleness which could be easily daunted and needed encouragement. She advanced with veiled eyes, and Greville took her hand and led her up to him.

"Emma," he said, smiling, and put the hand in Sir William's.

Still she did not raise the eyes, the colour rose slightly to her cheek from the quickly beating heart, and the more so when Sir William stooped and kindly kissed the velvet flush. He retained her hand and she led him into the parlour, and to the chair she had so softly cushioned in expectation of an aged and honoured guest, for, do what Greville would he could not persuade her otherwise than

that his "dear Hamilton" being over fifty must hover on senility. "Poor old gentleman!" she had said with hearty sympathy. "We'll make him comfortable, so we will! Does he like a footstool, Greville?" And even Greville had seen the humour of the situation and had left the reality to take care of itself.

For now, Emma's exploring eyes penetrated their shield of auburn lashes, and she beheld as handsome a man as ever she had seen in her life. He could not be more distinguished than Greville, for that was impossible, but he equalled him there, and surpassed him in a more good-humoured disdain of the persons not similarly favoured by circumstances. Greville's disdain was conscious; Sir William's perfectly unstudied and natural, not known to himself as disdain, and therefore infinitely more impressive. Such an obvious matter required no insistence. He never gave it a thought, any more than his breathing or his heart-beat. A Hamilton of the princely Scottish house, a *habitué* of courts all the days of his life, porphyrogenitus—born in the purple, so to speak—what could the average citizen appear in those genial indifferent eyes but a necessary incumbrance in the life of the Great? And there was more; educated, cultivated to the highest point, an arbiter of taste, an infallible judge in matters of accomplishment, happy in his *bonnes fortunes* with women, an indolently skilful diplomatist in a court of indolent pleasures—what was lacking to make Sir William charming?

Nothing, nothing! Even Greville looked a little starched, a little pinched beside him, too decided, too—yes, he became angular in that calm, worldly-wise company. Sir William sat himself in the armchair, laughing, rejected the cushions and fixed an eye keen under all its sunshine upon Emma as she glided to her place behind the tea-tray, and stilled the hissing urn.

That eye which had ranged over the beauties of Greece and Rome, fair in imperishable bronze and marble, which had surveyed the loveliest of the modern world and taken their measure and appraised each charm, now rested on Emma.

She poured his tea and offered the sandwiches, thankful to see by Greville's expression that the provision pleased him. She picked with rosy fingers the green cups from the strawberries and prepared the mounded deliciousness with sugar, and poured the wrinkling cream, but in a calm silence. She felt, she knew she was doing the right thing in perfection, yet had no notion that Nature forced her daughter consummately to play her part. She thought it her own cleverness, while she could have done no other had she tried with all her strength, and humbly hoped it would please the great man.

It pleased him. He watched her steadily, once or twice missed what Greville said, once or twice forgot what he himself was saying and caught it by the tail as it vanished. Greville, at first a little huffed by this absence of mind, at last saw its point and triumphed silently. Emma understood fully.

Tea finished, she rose and stood beside Greville.

"I'll take the tea out and wash up the cups. It will help mother, and these are our most precious teacups, Sir William. May I go, Greville?"

"Certainly, provided you come back then."

Greville was gracious but did not rise to open the door though she moved towards it with the teapot. Sir William's haste rebuked him, for he sprang, light as a boy, from the chair and held the door open with a smile at her.

"What, the fair tea-maker supposes that I shall do nothing in return for the delicious meal she has given me? A thousand times no! Greville, the tray is heavy for her."

The two between them piled the tray and finally dismissed her through the door with one on either side like heraldic supporters. It closed on her.

"Now we can talk!" said Greville, and drew his chair up to his kinsman's.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION

The first word he said was "Well?" with a keen glance at Sir William, lying back, luxurious, in his chair. There was still a scent of strawberries in the room and the faint perfume of a woman's dress. Outside the Green was very quiet in the sinking sunlight.

Sir William was deliberate.

"In my whole life I never saw a woman so beautiful. The face, figure, colouring—perfection. The manner adorable. You prepared me for something unusual, but I never dreamt of anything like this. Lord, what a waste! In any other position she must have been a European beauty."

"But, my dear Hamilton, you must understand she was not like this when I took her. That she was beautiful, I allow, but it was an untaught, somewhat noisy hoyden with Fetherstonehaugh. I found her quarrelling with him on the smallest provocation, ready to rollick like a good-humoured boy with the men he had down, inclined to rely too much on her good looks without attending to them; indeed, I have noticed her very nails in need of attention. But I felt the waste exactly as you now feel it, and you see the result of four years' careful education; I might almost say *creation*."

"If creation, I can only say you rank with Phidias. Indeed, your *chef-d'œuvre* surpasses his. A more complete beauty I never beheld. But while I don't disparage your powers, I must say, my dear Greville, that the girl must have extraordinary ones herself. And can the story

you told me of her antecedents be true? I never saw attractive modesty more expressed in any face."

Greville applied himself to dissection.

"Absolutely true. Probably, since she confided in me herself I don't even know the whole of her adventures though I verified her tale with inquiries. But the point with Emma is this: she is everything by turns; everything she chooses or the circumstances suggest. She sees instinctively the part which will please and plays it to admiration and thus is always at the top of her audience. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly. You convey that whoever creates the picture she is always in it."

"Exactly. In my belief that must have been the secret of all the great actresses of history, not to mention the great courtesans. Be sure Aspasia convinced her lover that she was a deep stateswoman as well as highly gifted in poetry, music and art."

"And she was so."

"Not she!" says Greville, with his cool contempt for women. "She merely caught his ray as a mirror catches the sun and flashed it back upon him blindingly. Combine that power with sex and beauty and you have a dazzled world."

"Yet you are not dazzled?"

"I have lived with her for four years. I know how the springs work," says Greville sententiously. "All the same, she is remarkable. I believe there is nothing beyond her, given the opportunity. Nothing, that is, which moves her. She could have been a great actress, so expressive is she. Talk to her of the Siddons, and in a moment she will out-Siddons the woman herself in pose; a ghastly Lady Macbeth creeping to the murder. Remind her of Mrs. Jordan and she is comedy incarnate, all roguish laughter."

Sir William reflected, gazing at the chair Comedy had lately occupied and at her wistful-eyed portrait over the mantelpiece.

"It appears to me," he said at length, "that having lived with her so long you have perhaps become so used to these qualities that it has a little dulled your perception of what they really signify. For since woman is always more or less of a parasite [Here the eighteenth century was vocal on the good man's lips!] we must not expect more from them than is possible. But when carried to the height you describe, it becomes what, for a woman, is genius. And, with beauty as a pedestal, you get the woman that the world remembers."

"Her antecedents forbid that," says Greville with his cool certainty. "Aspasias exist no longer. There is no place for them in society. You have the Pompadours whose only skill is to traffic in places, the political beauties like the Duchess of Devonshire and Mrs. Crewe, and the detestable blue-stocking. And a certain amount of decency is required before a woman can be taken at all seriously."

"Of decency a very little will go a long way if combined with beauty," said Sir William, with the edge of a cynical smile touching his lips. If the Spirit of Comedy were perched on the chair Emma so lately had occupied, she also must have smiled, one imagines, to see these two grave gentlemen discussing the destiny of the woman who was to settle theirs. Indeed, the Spirit of Tragedy might almost have joined the party and animated the sad and far-seeing eyes of the portrait above the mantel.

"Her past and present, of course, shut dignified doors to her," he continued, "but plenty of others are open and she may yet attain a kind of private influence which may be of help to you, if you give her the right setting."

"Not to me. My circumstances forbid it, and the very thing I want to consult you on, my dear Hamilton, is how to part with her with the least pain to her, and the best provision I can afford to make, which will be little indeed, I regret to say."

Sir William looked at him in the utmost astonishment.

"What, a man in his thirties, and part with a siren like that? You hinted at it, but now I have seen her I find it incredible. Are you on the hunt for Venus herself? Or does she care for you no longer?"

"Care?" Greville was piqued. "I don't overstate if I say she loves me passionately. She has a quick little temper, but I might almost say she crawls to my feet for forgiveness if she offends. A more docile, pliable pupil, too, never existed. No, no. The trouble does not lie there. My debts ruffle me seriously. I have no choice. Marry I must, and I have fixed upon a lady suitable in every respect. But I need not tell you that in the town where everything is known I must part with Emma before I make my formal offer. I would willingly let things continue as they are. But you see?"

"I see," said Hamilton, "a nice dilemma. But if you do part with her, let it be final. I have always been averse from the idea of these relationships continuing after marriage. Very few wives can be brought to take such a matter with indifference and where a husband is largely dependent on a wife's fortune and settlements are strict—well, it needs no detailing for a man who desires peace."

"I fully agree. No, the parting shall be final."

"I conclude it is one of the Middleton daughters. I heard something to that effect from the Duchess of Argyll yesterday."

"Gossip!" Greville shrugged his shoulders. "But, yes,

I have no concealments from you. It is the second daughter. I think it will be brought to bear, with your countenance."

"You will certainly have that!" Sir William said with warm cordiality. "And you have my free leave to assure Lord Middleton that you are my heir."

Greville wrung his hand with real gratitude.

"But marriage, my dear Hamilton? You are still a young attractive man and I hope, I sincerely hope, to see you yet settled in a happy home of your own."

"I shall never remarry," Sir William said gravely and sadly. "You know as well as I the devotion and piety of your aunt. She was a saint on earth and an example of all that is loveliest in woman's character. It would be impossible to replace her and I shall not try. No, tell Lord Middleton my mind is resolved. As to the debts—but we will consider that later. What are your views for Emma?"

Greville reflected. He really had not yet formulated them even to himself. The concert-room, the opera, the stage, all these ideas had jostled one another in his head, but there was not one that did not call for a training he could not afford. And furthermore, he was very far from willing (in the Middleton interest) to superintend her affairs in any way or seem to preserve the slightest thread of attachment between them. He put this matter to his uncle and they discussed it for a while as a difficulty.

"An Italian training for her voice is what she needs," said Greville. "It has that kind of pure light brilliance which corresponds exactly to the Italian idea. That would be a settled career for her. But we must not go too fast. You must hear her. You are a far more finished connoisseur in music than I, and perhaps I may overstate her powers. I will have her singing-master here tomorrow and you shall judge. Let me call her back. She

has invented a pretty little amusement you will approve, I am sure. She throws herself into uncommon attitudes and thus makes quite elegant little sculpturesques of herself. Whether it could be developed as a paying entertainment—but you shall see."

Sir William, deeply interested, assented and Emma was recalled from the tinkle of china audible in the distance. She came tripping in, her little dog running after her, the ideal young married niece and elderly uncle's delight, for that was how she saw herself at the moment. That impression was also instantly conveyed to Sir William. She pulled a low seat beside him and began to talk with those fluty low notes which captivated the listener quite apart from any nonsense or sense she chose to utter. She must hear about Naples, about his great house there, and did he really ever see the Queen? Was she beautiful? Did she wear her crown often? Was Naples as lovely as in Greville's book of pictures? And, oh, if she could but ever, ever see it!

Sir William was enchanted. He saw no reason why his niece Emma—for so he really must call her—should not come out some day and taste the beauties of that land of the orange and myrtle. He knew not whether she would be the more admired or admiring, probably the former. "For," said he, "lovely as the Italian women are there is a sameness. The same glorious black eyes flash on you from every countenance. The same rippled raven hair crowns every brow; I may almost say the same finely chiselled features are the rule, so that each must depend for distinction upon her expression and manner. Now you, my dear Emma, have the beauty of their most famous antiques, but the glory of your warm auburn colouring and violet eyes, for so they appear at this moment, must single you out instantly. Added to this, Greville has been dwelling on your accomplishments to me, and these

are rare among the Italian belles, who are foolish enough to believe beauty alone can enchain a man for ever and ever."

"It could only hold a fool," says she, catching responsive fire from the idea. "Men of culture and learning like you and Greville would demand much, much more. Oh, Sir William, I have tried indeed, but I will try harder still to deserve your approval as well as Greville's and make myself an accomplished woman."

So it went on, and Greville sitting a little in the background, watched them. And as he did so, and saw those liquid eyes beaming confidence and affection to his uncle, and Sir William's elderly orbs lost in their pellucid depths, a thought flashed across his mind so rapid, so overwhelming in its lucidity that he caught his breath audibly, and marvelled he had never considered it before.

Sir William must not marry, for that would be the ruin of his own plans. But Sir William must run the gauntlet of a thousand temptations to the wedding ring. One had but to look at him for that assurance. Furthermore, women's society was a necessity of his life. The widower of the Palazzo Sessa was certainly not its hermit; no man living more loved gaiety, amusement with thronging interests of every description. And Emma—the exquisite modern-antique—a Pompeian dancer floating up from dark dead ages to charm a modern world; Emma, with her maddening beauty, her poses and attitudes which repeated at command all the statues and pictures which were the delight of Sir William; Emma, with her voice of crystal to enchant him with the *bel canto* he loved so passionately; and above all, Emma, with her shameful story which set marriage once and for ever out of the question —there was the perfect solution! An unrivalled companion for Sir William's loneliness, the position for Emma of an old man's darling on whom every cost, every ac-

complishment, would be lavished; and for himself freedom—freedom, and the graceful attitude of having conferred a heavy obligation on an attached relative! He sank into deep thought as they murmured on, lost in the interest of this meeting.

Does there seem an unpardonable obliquity in the mind that admits such a consideration? The recorder of the manners and morals of another age does not pretend to compare them with this, nor the materialism of the eighteenth century with the pure idealism and lofty standards of conduct in such matters of the twentieth. Yet Greville had his standard of conscience also, such as it was. It stood aside from the pleasures a gentleman might choose to indulge himself in, but in revenge insisted on certain points to be observed in the way they were transacted. Sir Harry Fetherstonehaugh's behaviour to Emma was odious in Greville's eyes. Brutality, coarseness, open infidelity even to a mistress, were things his code could not for a moment admit. Infidelity to a wife—whose cause the world would countenance—was a far lesser matter, though one he would reasonably hope to avoid, provided she pleased him. He had also observed a kindly and correct demeanour toward the little Emma, who was certainly no rightful concern of his. The baby school-bills were regularly settled, nor had he any thought of retreating from that obligation. And lastly, nothing would induce him to abandon Emma without a proper provision for her needs.

If materialism disguised in the wig and spectacles of the ancient maiden Prudence pointed out how much simpler it would be should another, on whose kindness he could rely, undertake her maintenance, was the thought so very unnatural as to warrant any censor arising and calling him the reversed of blessed?

Be that as it may it must be owned that it came as a

solvent of all his difficulties, could Emma be brought to view the matter sensibly. The utmost, the most delicate caution, would however be necessary before that could become possible.

Having reached that point—and the two others the degree of confidence when Emma rested her hand timidly on the Ambassador's knee, drinking in his every word—Greville with his usual method docketed his illumination, parcelled up its brilliance, and placed it in a mental pigeonhole for easy reference, drew an agreeable smile over his anxieties and asked Sir William if he would like to see the attitudes which Emma had invented one day in Romney's studio to that master's entrancement. She ran gaily upstairs to bring her little apparatus.

"She is perfectly fascinating!" Sir William said, with enthusiasm rare in such a finished man of the world. "A most adorable companion. Intelligent, receptive, a perfect listener—"

"Didn't I tell you?" says Greville with his slow smile. "But don't spoil her, my dear Hamilton, I entreat. She is the most unspoilt spontaneous creature in the world at present, and I have never given her an indigestion of sugar-plums. Make her self-conscious and the dew is off the rose."

"Very true, but who can look at her and be wise? With all my soul I pity you, if you must let her go. And for Miss Middleton—a cold, correctly-featured girl with no fire, no sparkle!"

"My poverty and not my will consents," quoted Greville with a shrug, as Emma came in dressed in a white robe simply caught at the waist and falling in the long straight folds dear to the heart of that lover of the classical, Sir William. The sleeves were short, disclosing a pair of rounded arms; on one was slung a wreath of artificial roses, in one hand a tambourine.

"The perfect Greek! Stand, stand there, just at the door, for a moment!" cried the enraptured connoisseur. "Good God, what an attitude!"

She froze herself instantly into immobility, framed in the doorway, the long folds falling solemnly about her, the face calm as death, a breathing statue. And, as he watched, a faintly dawning smile touched the corners of her perfect lips and spread upwards like light until it reached her eyes, and then, with a sweet cry, she sprang forward, and dropping the roses at her feet flung the arm upward with the tambourine until it rang again and so stood all life and radiance caught on the wave of a dance, each light limb expressing its perfect movement though struck into marble for the instant—a Pompeian dancer, the flower of love's insolence, the living blossom of a dead civilization.

"I got the pose from the vase the Duchess of Portland bought from you a while ago, and I called it 'The Pompeian Dancer,' as there is a certain amount of interest taken in the excavations now. You like it?" says Greville, lowering his voice.

"Divine!" whispered Sir William briefly, impatient of the words and concentrating every sense on the vision.

"Then what would you think if you could but see it as it should be done! Romney has contrived a light in the studio, a strong light that falls on the left, and she stands in an immense picture frame and—"

He saw Sir William was not listening and stopped. His soul was in his eyes. Presently she drooped aside and slid on to the floor and so sat, with chin cupped in soft hand and one long bright lock falling beside her throat, her pensive eyes, lakes of sorrow, following a far, far ship receding in dimmest distance—Ariadne watching the departing Theseus who carried all her joys with him. Was she thinking of her long-ago sailor? Did she catch up

past experiences and mould them into present beauty, or was it drawn from some deep well of ancient mysterious pre-natal experience beyond all guessing of herself or others? No one ever knew. She never knew herself. It *was;* as inevitably as the trees repeat their ancient symphony of bloom, and joy returns from the past with each revolving year.

This was but the beginning of those famous Attitudes which were later to hold the world. But such as they were they struck the gazer dumb. He came to them fresh and saw them complete, unlike Greville who had known the inception and quarrelled with Romney and Emma alike over the set of a fold, the poise of a wrist and so forth. To him it appeared a miracle of finished beauty. He said as much when she had presented the four poses which were all she had as yet designed and, taking her hand, kissed her again on the cheek and thanked her for an afternoon of such pleasure as he had rarely experienced. Greville also thanked her with a cordiality she had missed of late and the returning warmth cheered her like the glow of sunshine. He forgave—he loved her. The way back to his heart was to please this charming uncle who meant ease, freedom from anxiety and all else to her Greville. Indeed it should not be difficult. She would do her utmost, joyfullest best.

They took her to the play that night, and Sir William and she laughed at the comedy of the frolicsome Mrs. Jordan together, while the smiling Greville sat beside them in the box and loaded her with every attention she had missed. He was resolved Sir William should be well aware of the value of this treasure.

Emma slept that night satiate with happiness.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BARGAIN

The friendship between Emma and the Ambassador strengthened every day, and to Greville's secret amusement and satisfaction, he was continually in Edgware Row. London, apart from the antiquarian interests in which he met congenial spirits, was tame and dull in comparison with the delight of sitting with "the fair tea-maker" as he called her, listening to the wonderful voice, suggesting yet more wonderful Attitudes, lounging for hours in Romney's studio where he made his unwearied studies of Emma in every character that literature or her own marvellous versatility could suggest. He gave an order to Romney for her portrait as a Bacchante that he might not be parted (so he said) from so much beauty when he was compelled to return to Naples.

"Oh, but don't talk of return, my kind dear friend, I beseech you! What shall we do, Greville and me, when you go? You take the sunlight with you!" said Emma with an expression of pain and fear in those irresistible eyes. "If you did but know, but you can't, what happiness you have brought with you! All my Greville's anxieties seem to have vanished away, and we live as care-free as the birds yonder. What don't I owe you! If I could repay it—ah, if I could!"

"To look at you and enjoy your presence is to be repaid with interest!" said the Ambassador, and meant it from the bottom of his heart. He was approaching the age when it is easier to find pleasures at home than to go

abroad to seek them, and there was a warm atmosphere of comfort, of woman's sweet serviceable ways about him there in which he was apt to purr like a contented cat. She knew his liking by instinct, divined a wish before he uttered it, and with Greville's guiding taste the surroundings in Edgware Row could not offend even the Hamilton fastidiousness. The little maid-servant, added to the establishment in honour of his frequent coming, would rush radiant to "Mrs. Hart" when his step was in the garden, and well she might, for Sir William's generous hand was often in his pocket even for the humble Molly Dring, while, as to Emma, she was the shrine of many and costly offerings, and he seldom came without a parcel to be opened with pretty cries of delight, and little shrieks to Greville to come and see what "our dear, dear uncle" has brought. She had offered to be either his "obliged humble servant or his affectionate niece," and he voted for the niece.

Those were halcyon days for Emma. She had never been so happy. She believed the cause to be that Greville was more contented than she had seen him for many a long day; kinder, less critical, more indulgent. The narrow limit of expense was enlarged for Sir William, the expeditions to the gaieties of London were more frequent, Sir William's calm good-nature was a mellowing sunshine on all the little asperities which disturbed her. Privately, deep in the recesses of her own heart, she encouraged dreams that Sir William's affection for her might lead to her marriage with Greville. If *he* approved, insisted, made the way easy from the money side of affairs, she felt she could not doubt what the end would be. She redoubled every attention to both her men. Every impulse to quick temper was ruled and governed. The sweet eyes which welcomed Sir William or smiled on Greville were dove's eyes for softness, and to crown all, she topped the part of the perfect housewife with the brilliant accom-

plishments which astonished Sir William beyond the very bounds of prudence.

Gavin Hamilton, the cousin artist, came often to study and sketch the wonder. He, too, succumbed to her fascinations. She was "a Roman beauty, opulent, luxuriant, dominating, the perfect classic re-animated for the rapture of the eighteenth century," and his admiration fanned Sir William's into flame, while Greville watched with silent pleasure, permitting the matter now to take its own safe course, and Emma expanded daily in the atmosphere of warm caressing admiration which was her soul's delight. She grew more beautiful, more brilliant, every day in that delicious sunshine; responsive as a flower. Endless were her dreams. If Greville married her, why then she might hope he would admit the little Emma as one of the circle. Why not? It could not be spoken, not hinted as yet; but once married, domestic pressure is slow but sure and she could imagine a future when Sir William might invite his nephew and niece with the small adopted daughter to do the honours for him at the Palazzo Sessa whilst he sank gently more and more into the interests of his antiquities and left the world to them. On *that* stage Emma was certain she could dazzle. The Honourable Mrs. Charles Greville could have no uncertainties she thought, so, when he spoke of going she took his hand and squeezed it nervously with wet eyes and implored him to delay. Indeed, the vast villa with its troops of gabbling servants seemed dull enough after the amenities of Edgware Row. He was in no hurry.

Greville wanted, however, to get him to himself and that seemed impossible with all the interests of Paddington Green.

"I think, my dear Hamilton, it is really time you should see with your own eyes the developments of the Milford estates. As you know, I have been there constantly, but

the master's eye— I think I must have your instructions on the spot. Time flies and you will be off to Naples again before long."

"Exactly. You're perfectly in the right. But presently will do. I have told San Severino that he must hear Emma sing and he can't come until next week. He will be perfectly infatuated. If she should ever visit Naples that will be an unrivalled introduction."

And when that week was done and Greville again protested gently.

"Yes, my dear boy, certainly. You are wisdom and goodness itself but the Principe dì Barberini swears he will not leave England until he has seen her Attitudes, and I am training her for the Proserpina on the plain of Enna. After that—"

After that Greville would take no denial. He must, he would prepare the way still further for the Great Plan, though much was to be entrusted to letters when Sir William was gone. Letters can be considered, slips carefully avoided. Greville much preferred letters.

Sir William would not hear of Emma's being left alone in Edgware Row while they went down to Wales. Could she not come with them? No, Greville was certain that could not be. They would be moving too quickly for her, would be engrossed with business at Milford.

"And besides, do you not think, my dear Hamilton, that she has looked a little pale of late? Sea bathing acts like a charm with her. I think of Parkgate. You will see her return in even greater beauty; Aphrodite rising from the sea. And I *did* think, unless you disapprove, of letting her have her little Emma as a companion. One would not be inhuman, and certainly it would give her a very natural pleasure."

Sir William demurred a little, a very little on that motion. "Whether it were well to strengthen that connec-

tion—" he hesitated. "There might in the future be difficulties, if the child—but after all, poor lovely girl, what more natural? Yes, Greville, I approve. You have a kindly heart."

"Indeed, I would not fail where Emma is concerned," Greville replied gravely. "I have respect for her innumerable good qualities as well as a strong affection. I am sincerely glad you approve."

All this was broached to Emma in the most agreeable way. One and all would feel the break-up of the little household, but the Milford business was imperative, and she needed the sea air and there would be letters, constant letters.

She did not dare to kiss Sir William at parting—so she said in a pretty letter to Greville later—but tendered a velvet cheek and received his salute with shy lashes dropped.

Yet, once away, fears returned. The actual distance magnified the class distance between her and the two men. Tall, distinguished, accomplished, moving in a world of which the gates had never opened, could never open to her, it seemed they might at any time be absorbed into their own Paradise never to return. Could they have sent her away as the beginning of the end? Oh, surely no!—and yet— Somehow, Heaven knows how, a waft of Miss Middleton's name had reached her—the Honourable Miss Middleton! Nothing certain, but disquieting. She grew nervous, self-distrustful. There was no one at Parkgate to give the necessary tribute of admiration to singing and Attitudes, and little Emma, though a charming blue-eyed creature, got on her nerves a little also.

Her letters reflected these moods.

"I am in the house of a laidy whose husband is at sea. The price is high but they don't lodge anybody without

boarding, and I thought it would not ruin us till I could have your oppinion which I hope to have freely as you will give it to one who will allways be happy to follow it, lett it be what it will. And though my little temper may have been sometimes high, believe me I have allways thought you right in the end when I have come to reason. I bathe and find the water very soult. Pray, my dearest Greville, write soon and tell me what to do with the child. For she is a great romp and I can hardly master her. She is tall, has good eys and brows, and as to lashes she will be passible. I am makeing and mending all I can for her. Do lett me come home as soon as you can for I am allmost broken-hearted being from you. You don't know how much I love you and your behaiver to me when we parted was so kind. Greville, I don't know what to do. How teadous does the time pass awhay until I hear from you. Endead I should be miserable if I did not recollect upon what happy terms we parted—parted, yess, but to meet again with tenfould happiness."

There was sharp anxiety in her mind as she wrote protesting these poor certainties. She could not enjoy the child's company with a care-free heart. As in an eclipse the lurid shadow slowly invades the rim of the sun and sheds a livid light that slowly darkens all, so a fear intangible, nothing to fight directly and therefore the more alarming, invaded her little world of content. Suppose Sir William should take Greville with him to Naples? Suppose—a hundred supposes!

She wrote again. He did not.

"Would you think it, Greville? Emma, the wild unthinking Emma, is a grave thoughtful phylosopher. [He would like that—it would please him.] 'Tis true, Greville, and I will convince you it is when I see you. But

how I am running on. I say nothing about this giddy wild girl of mine. What shall we do with her, Greville? Would you believe on Sattarday we had a little quarel, and I did slap her on her hands and when she came to kiss me and make it up, I took her on my lap and cried. Pray do you blame me or not? Pray tell me. O Greville, you don't know how I love her. When she comes and looks in my face and calls me mother endead I then truly am a mother, and the mother's feelings rise at once and tels me I am or ought to be a mother for she has a wright to my protection and I will do all in my power to prevent her falling into the error her poor miserable mother fell into."

She paused and read this over with a deep sense of its pathos. But would it touch or anger Greville? Who could tell? No, he must not think her unhappy—it might appear to refer to past differences, to upbraid him. She wrote on hurriedly.

"But why do I say miserable? Am I not happy abbove any of my sex?—at least in my situation. Does not Greville love me, or at least like me. Is he not a father to my child? Why do I call myself miserable? No, it was a mistake, and I will be happy, chearful and kind. Again, my dear Greville, the recollection of past scenes brings tears to my eys, but they are tears of happiness, Greville. I am obliged to give a shilling a day for the bathing house and whoman and two pence for the dress. It is a great expense and it fretts me when I think of it. No letter from my dear Greville. Why, my dearest Greville, what is the reason you don't write. Give my dear kind love and compliments to Pliney [Pliny, Sir William's nickname] and tell him I put you under his care and he must be answereble for you to me wen I see him."

So Emma, fluttering, perturbed, fighting the darkening shadows. And again:

"Pray, my dear Greville, lett me come home soon. I have been 3 weeks and if I stay a fortnight longer that will be five weeks, you know, and then the expense is above 2 guineas a week with washing. Sure I shall have a letter today. Can you, Greville—no, you can't have forgot your poor Emma allready. Though I am but a few weeks absent my heart will not one moment leave you. Don't you recollect what you said at parting? How you should be happy to see me again?"

But Greville had no intention of writing until just before her return. The last thing he desired was to feed the flame of her passion for him, and the thing he most desired was to loosen the bond gently, insensibly, and with as much certainty and as little cruelty as possible. And the pleading in her letters could not obliterate in the tranquil coldness of his mind the scenes and tempers which had disturbed him, nor, even if he could have forgiven those, could he forget for one moment the money necessities of his position.

The hint about the little Emma also was irritating and she had repeated it more plainly since. He must have encouraged Emma far beyond what was sensible if she could make so cool a proposition as to bring the child back with her. Very few men would have undertaken the schooling, and proper gratitude for that boon should have silenced her.

He and Sir William had returned to London when that letter reached him and was followed by another, which ended:

"My dear Greville, don't be angry, but I gave my grandmother five guineas, for she had laid some money

out on Emma, that I would not take her awhay shabbily. But Emma shall pay you. My dear Greville, I wish I was with you."

He foresaw himself eternally the prey of needy vulgar relations, with Emma growing older, more violent-tempered, more of a burden daily. It hardened his resolution, and after writing a brief letter entirely forbidding the Emma project and speaking of his desire for greater freedom and more solitude when she returned home, he opened the matter resolutely with Sir William that night. It had become really necessary from his point of view, for the Ambassador was returning to Naples in August, and there must be a sufficient understanding for letters to proceed on. There was no difficulty in opening the subject, for Miss Middleton had been seen and approved, and Sir William's mind was full of her.

"There should be no hesitation, no delay!" he said, taking out his precious snuff-box set with a fine cameo of Phaëton driving the Horses of the Sun. "She is a young woman of amiable manners and if not a finished beauty there is perhaps less chance of quiet with a woman whom all the town runs after. Write me word very soon that all is settled, and you shall not be forgotten in a gift, nor your bride either."

"You are all goodness and wisdom. Of course you are perfectly right. Not only will her money set me on my feet again, but the connection is good, and her parents' house will always be open to us. But Emma, my dear Hamilton, Emma! You understand the position thoroughly now you know her. Is she a woman to throw on the town? Would it be common mercy? The child, I shall of course keep at school. Any other project would be madness. But again I say—Emma?"

"Emma, indeed!" repeated Sir William and looked medi-

tatively at his boot. Then—"Has any definite idea occurred to you, Charles?"

"Undoubtedly one has occurred, but whether your wisdom would approve it, I can't tell. But first—you really can scarcely understand the shock it will be to me to part with her. She is the sweetest companion. I have been so candid with regard to her little quick spurts of temper that you will believe me when I say this."

"It needs very little telling to realize that she is one that would be missed severely. I pity your necessity, Charles, more than I can say. Gavin Hamilton agrees with me that he has never seen her like all the world over."

"Exactly. But I have no alternative. Still, it would add to my grief if I had to think of her fallen in other hands doubtfully kind, accepting her as the mere common woman of pleasure. She is far from that."

"Far." Hamilton's very tone was conviction.

"Indeed, yes. My plan is this, then—but much depends on your co-operation. Her voice—well, you know it. Might it be in any way possible to send her to Naples for singing lessons which could be continued under your supervision, and could your influence then be exerted to procure her an opening in opera either at Naples or preferably at Milan? Given but chance, I believe she might attain European celebrity."

"I believe so too," said Hamilton, and fell into thought. He coloured slightly; his eyes narrowed as he looked down. Greville knew what was in his mind as clearly as if he had spoken aloud. The seed was set, though apparently unconsciously on Greville's side. He had been perfectly adroit. He smiled a little to himself as he pursued his quiet way.

"My plan was that her mother should accompany her. She needs a companion. Then, of course, arises the question of money. The mother is an excellent cook, as you

know, and housekeeper. If she could get a position in one of the English families, she could pay a little towards Emma's expenses, and the slender help I could give would not be lacking."

"This certainly is the germ of an idea," said Hamilton in meditation. "I will consider all you say most carefully. I am interested in Emma's wonderful qualities. I would willingly aid where I can. I am at one with you in the notion that we could not cast her off without assistance. It would be unworthy. But, come!—be frank with me, Charles. Is there any difficulty in her disposition that I don't comprehend? These tempers? And is she vain? Frivolous? Mercenary?"

For an answer Greville drew her last letter from his pocket and laid it in Sir William's hands.

"I received your kind letter last night, and, my dearest Greville, I want words to express how happy it made me. For I thought I was like a lost sheep and every one had forsook me. I was eight days very ill, but am a great deal better for your kind instructing letter and I own the justice of your remarks. You shall have your appartment to yourself. You shall read, wright, or sett still, just as you pleas, for I shall think myself happy to be under the same roof with Greville and do all I can to make it agreable without disturbing him in any pursuits. For your absence has taught me that I ought to think myself happy if I was within a mile of you. You shall find me good, kind, gentle, affectionate and everything you wish me to do I will do. O Greville, to think it is nine weeks since I saw you. I think I shall die with the pleasure of seeing you. Oh, how I long to see you."

"Is this a spoilt, capricious beauty?" says he, when Sir William had finished it.

"No, a tender, womanly, submissive charmer. But it frightens me another way. Greville, she will never leave you."

"She will, if we can impress upon her that it is to *my* advantage. She never will for herself. Poor soul!—moving, I own!"

Greville touched one of the fundamentals in this remark and did not know it. Sir William's warmer heart appreciated it.

"We must make it as easy for her as we can. Certainly I should have no objection to her being under my protection—"

Something in the phrase made him uncomfortable. He stopped with a shade of embarrassment, then continued, "I mean I will willingly oversee the question of putting the mother out and of lending my influence to advance Emma's music and its results. On these points I shall write more fully when I have considered, and meanwhile I advise you wean her gradually. Separate slowly, imperceptibly."

"I have begun. I conditioned strictly for the parlour for my own use. I shall sleep frequently in town. Depend upon my showing every consideration. You can count on that. Do not be uneasy."

It was strange, but extremely adroit, the manner in which Sir William was put in the position of the person whose feelings were the most to be considered with regard to Emma. She might have been far more of a charge upon his conscience than on Greville's. Little more was said. Neither could be more particular, for there was now an unspoken matter between them which outweighed all words uttered. Their eyes did not meet when Greville, gazing out at the twinkling lights, said:

"I will keep you fully acquainted, my dear Hamilton,

and will rely on your kind-hearted assistance in a matter so delicate."

And Sir William, equally attentive to the rising moon dimming the flickering oil lamps in the streets, replied.

"Certainly. And to revert to your own business; you have fully understood, Charles, that I am prepared to stand security if you think well to borrow for your debts? I have no hesitation about that."

Greville's gratitude knew no bounds and, with his satisfaction, was perfectly sincere. It convinced him that there was a clear understanding, that the bargain was absolutely completed and Emma's affection was the only remaining difficulty. His heart beat high for so well-conducted a heart. His burden was loosening and life before him.

So Emma returned to a home no longer hers, to a gradually deepening isolation from the man she loved, and to a constant recitation of the difficulties he had to face. It seemed as if Sir William had taken the sunshine with him.

And far off in the West Indies a young sea captain of twenty-five, Captain Horatio Nelson, was going about his business, asserting the honour of his country with his own, as great English admirals have done from time immemorial. Slight, quiet, self-contained, he was pronounced "an interesting young man" by those who knew him best; an aggressive young man by those who crossed his bows in the way of his duty. The French officers forgot to hoist the colours at Fort Royal, Martinique, when H. M. S. *Boreas* did them the honour to call, and though, unlike the famous Admiral Hawkins, Captain Nelson did not send a shot to enforce sea courtesy, he had the offender arrested, and accepted an apology with haughtiness and

difficulty. Again, when he had favoured the governor of some of the West Indian islands with suggestions for the better discharge of mutual duties, and the irate official replied that "old generals were not in the habit of taking advice from young gentlemen," that particular young gentleman replied:

"I have the honour, sir, of being as old as the Prime Minister of England [Pitt] and think myself as capable of commanding one of His Majesty's ships as that minister is of governing the State."

Neat and conclusive. On that station it was considered that on the whole Captain Nelson was a promising young officer and likely to be heard of later. He was to meet his fate in marriage next year, and nothing pointing to converging lines could be observed either in his prospects or Emma's.

Yet every day, every hour was steadily preparing that meeting.

PART II

CHAPTER IX

THE BARGAIN CONCLUDED

The letters on which Greville counted set in between him and his uncle directly Hamilton was re-established in the Palazzo Sessa. The complaisant uncle wrote also to Emma, dwelling much on the charms of Naples and its society and on its extraordinary advantages for the pursuit of accomplishments never to be attained in England. Even in the midst of growing uneasiness Emma was flattered by those letters, for he wrote not as to the ignorant, unthinking girl whom she felt herself daily with Greville, but rather as to the "phylosopher" she fondly hoped to make herself. Was it the Emma of Up Park and of a still darker past who could receive such letters as this from the great Hamilton, the celebrated Ambassador? She felt it a great, an amazing promotion.

"The whole art is, really, to live all the *days* of our life: and not with anxious care disturb the sweetest hour that life affords—which is the present. Admire the Creator, and all His works to us incomprehensible: and do all the good you can upon earth, and take the chance of eternity without dismay."

She was charmed with this easy good-humoured rationalism. It fell in with her own to perfection. To be allowed to enjoy the present was all she ever asked. To admire a Creator who was responsible for her own embellishments and had made them the means of attracting Greville was pleasant so long as He asked no more, and to be charitable was always a delight to her good nature if she had the chance of going beyond the halfpenny limit which

Greville had enjoined. She wrote back to the genial preacher with a docile enthusiasm which delighted him. Greville wrote also, every word considered.

"Emma is very grateful for your remembrance. Her picture shall be sent by the first ship. She certainly is much improved since she has been with me. She has none of the bad habits which giddiness and inexperience encouraged. I am sure she is attached to me or she would not have refused the offers which I know to have been great, and such is her spirit that on the least slight or expression of my being tired or burdened by her, I am sure she would not only give up the connexion but would not accept a farthing for future assistance."

Greville knew while he wrote these words that they were not wholly true. Emma had endured many slights and reproofs and had mounted upon no outraged dignity. As to help, in her forlorn condition, passionately attached to himself, she would accept it if only for the sake of the bond it implied. But it *might* be so, it read well, and would impress Hamilton.

It decidedly impressed Hamilton. A good-natured cynic, knowing his world thoroughly, he began to believe that here was the blue rose of all sexual dreams. He had not the faintest objection to Emma's past if it had not degraded her mind, and if he could trust the close observer Greville and his own knowledge it certainly had not done that. And in her company he would be absolutely secure because every kindness must be received as a benefit and it was impossible that the question of marriage should ever arise and disappoint her.

He wrote more and more eagerly to Greville and the shabby plot developed apace; but it never occurred to

either that it was shabby. On the contrary, the girl was so ignorant of the world and so helpless as regards her future that to plot her a happy and secure one was a kindness to deserve eternal gratitude. If, incidentally, it suited both of them also, why, so much the better!

Greville at last, however, felt the time had come to be outspoken for it was clearly his rôle to lead the way and Sir William was warily silent. He spoke at full length of the happiness of the experiment he had made, which must now, alas! come to an end through poverty, and added:

"If you did not choose a wife, I wish the tea-maker of Edgware Row was yours. I do not know how to part with what I am not tired with. I do not know how to go on, and I give her every merit of prudence and moderation and affection. She shall never want. I should not write to you thus if I did not think *you* seemed as partial as I am to her. She would not hear at once of any change, and from no one that was not liked by her. I think I could secure her near £100 a year. With parting with part of my *virtu* I can secure it to her. If I could go on I would never make this arrangement. And as she is too young and handsome to retire into a convent or the country, and is honourable and honest and can be trusted, after reconciling myself to the necessity I consider where she could be happy. I know you thought me jealous of your attention to her. Judge then, as you know my satisfaction in looking on a modern piece of *virtu*, if I do not think you a second self."

Sir William, reading this by a window looking on the blue bay glittering in Italian sunshine, smiled to himself, a smile of mixed ingredients. He saw most of Greville's reasons for this affair as plainly as the writer himself. He was perfectly aware of the position opened up for Greville if he should remarry. He was perfectly clear as

to the advantages to Greville of a connection which would entangle his feet in roses and keep him away from the prosaic paths of married security and a possible and inconvenient family. But all this appeared to him entirely natural, even commendable. How could Charles be expected to reason otherwise? And for his own part he had no temptations to marriage. At his age he had no desire to set up a family which he could never hope to see grow up. There would be much more to spend on the collection of *virtu* and other amusements if he had not a wife to support in the state of an ambassador. Emma was the most fascinating woman he had ever beheld, and for Greville he had the habit of an affection which, if not warm, was sincere.

He wrote a letter of guarded encouragement and asked if there were any definite plan to be put before him.

The one question which might have cried a halt had never occurred to his mind. Was Greville tired of her, and if so why? No, that point had been too carefully guarded. He really sympathized with poor Charles' self-sacrifice. He wrote with extreme caution a half assent, and left the formal proposal to Greville. The letter came speedily in answer.

"If you could form a plan by which you could have a trial, and could invite her and tell her I ought not to leave England and state it as a kindness to me if she would accept your invitation she would go with pleasure. And if you could write an answer to this and inclose a letter to her I could manage it and either by land, by the coach to Geneva, and from thence by *Vetturino* forward her, or else by sea. After a month and absent from me she would consider the whole more calmly. If there was in the world a person she loved so well as yourself after me, I could not arrange with so much *sang-froid* and I

am sure I would not let her go to you if any risque of the usual coquetry of the sex were likely to give uneasiness."

This was accepted.

So it was settled, and now remained Emma, the essential part of the delightful plan. He was not in the least alarmed. A charming settlement in charming rooms in charming Naples and under the august protection of the British Ambassador—Good God! what a fortune, what promotion for a woman in Emma's position! She might thank her stars for such immense good luck. And her mother with her—her old cook of a mother to be honoured in only a lesser degree! Indeed, Greville, sitting in the solitude of the parlour of Edgware Row, could not but contrast his own action very handsomely with the code of most of the men he knew with regard to mistresses who had ceased to please. A letter for her was enclosed, as he had desired. He heard her running down the stair and called her in.

She hurried, obedient, and pulled her low stool to his feet.

"Do you know, Greville, I was just longing to come in. I've had a letter about the little Emma. Oh, such a darling she's getting. She's very well and the mistress says the hair is growing so pretty on her forehead, and her nose isn't near so snub as when I saw her. Her eyes are real blue and very pretty, and the mistress says she don't speak near so countrified as she did. Won't it be lovely if she grows up a pretty girl? Greville, don't you think you would like to see her in the holidays? Don't you? She's so sensible!"

She turned herself against him like a caressing animal, softly winding about him until she got her head on his shoulder, and from that vantage point looked up.

If anything had been wanting to harden Greville it was

that reference, that pretty plea. It foreshadowed most of what he had come to dread, and besides appeared a most unwarrantable piece of selfishness. He need indeed have very little consideration for any one who could show so little for him! And at a moment when he was exerting every power in her favour. But nothing of this escaped him.

"I have a letter from Pliny, Emma, and here's one for you. He has thought of the most agreeable, the most useful plan for us, and how to be sufficiently grateful I am sure I don't know. I'll tell you first and then you shall read your letter."

She subsided onto her stool, that she might look up with breathless interest.

"Do you remember when he was here how you said you longed to see Naples?"

"Don't I! There's hardly a day but I've thought of it!"

"Then here's your invitation!" he held it, triumphant, just above her reach, smiling himself with pleasure.

"Oh, Greville—no! I can't believe it!"

"Yes; and offers you the finest singing and drawing lessons in the world. I did not judge it wise to make you too vain, but he said before he left, 'Emma's voice, if cultivated, may put her in the front rank of European singers.'"

She clasped her hands in speechless joy, looking at him with eyes so beautiful, so charged with rapture, that he kissed her on the spot. Indeed she deserved it. She was falling admirably into his plan.

"The *angel!*" says Emma, relaxing at that into vocal bliss. "Was there ever such a man? Oh, Greville, I love him, I love him with my very soul!"

"You ought, you must, if gratitude has any meaning for you."

"And when do we go?"

"We— No, you are aware I must remain here for some months. It would be a poor return to my uncle if I were to neglect his Milford interests because he is so amazingly generous to you. Why, he invites your mother to go with you. If you were a Duchess there could not be more consideration."

"But what is anything, *anything* to me if you are not there? Do you *choose* to leave me?"

Doubt clouded the beams of her eyes, the sparkle was quenched. He felt instinctively she was searching for hidden meanings. The woman who has not the security of the wife must be ever and always on guard. He forgot that; why should she not wholly trust him? He found it irritating, and drew slightly away.

"It is not a question of choosing. I can only say Sir William's suggestion comes like a sunburst on my difficulties. I have told you often of late that I cannot meet my expenses—"

"And haven't I tried to save and—"

"Certainly, but a few pence saved on the butcher's bill or the milliner's don't touch the difficulty. The house, the living—"

"But I would live in a hovel; I would eat bread and water—"

"I wouldn't," said he, with perfect decision. "And no more would you when it came to the point. Pray, Emma, be sensible. Don't you remember that though I have complained of my expenses for some considerable time you have never ceased to hint and even to press for my having little Emma as an additional burden? I own I felt it inconsiderate."

She was all humility and repentance; kissed his hands, would have kissed his feet if permitted.

"Wicked selfish girl I am! But it was only heedlessness,

indeed. I have quite come into your way of thinking that she's best at school. She can't miss what she never has, and they'll train her better than me. But, oh, Greville, I'll write and tell Pliny I can't leave you. No, I'll tell you, I'll take a servant's place to be near you, or let me be *your* servant and I won't envy the Queen on her throne. That way I'll cost you nothing, but I'll see you and that's my sunshine."

The words poured out, imploring, pleading, as if for dear life. He saw his way in that last speech.

"Emma, if you would but reflect. Has it not occurred to you that if you could become a great European singer and give me the opportunity to improve my position, money would no longer be our difficulty? Why will you not be calm and consider? Is all my teaching thrown away?"

It is cold fact that Greville's conscience no more pinched him in holding out that rainbow hope than in any other part of the proceedings. If a child won't take a necessary pill you smother it in jam and mislead it for its own good. That was the point of view from which he could not waver.

He had touched her there. Visionary, quick, eager. She saw herself a dispenser of riches, surrounding Greville with luxuries and splendours.

"You mean—Greville, *could* I? Does Pliny and you believe I could make my fortune? Then why, why, can't I sing here and make our home together? I could sing at Vauxhall at Ranelagh. Why—that night—!" But his slight frown warned her that episode must be forgotten.

"There are two excellent reasons against that plan. In the first place it would be madness to appear in public before you are sufficiently trained. In the next, I cannot be in London. I am obliged to be at least six months in

Scotland and Milford, and it is impossible *you* should be with me." He reckoned on his fingers and added:

"Six months; that would bring us to November, if you left in March. Should you dislike a winter in Italy with me?"

The inflammable nature of her! Instantly the outlook changed. A winter in Italy with Greville! Oh, joy of joys! But would he really come? Swear? She did not want Pliny. She wanted to be alone with her mother and work night and day at her singing until she could lavish riches on their joint life.

"I trust my Emma will see that to offend Sir William would be a very poor return to me!" he said gravely.

"So it would indeed," cries she, swinging round instantly. "No; I will be a most dutiful niece to him. Trust me, Greville. But sure you're not angry because I can't bear to leave my dearest? How could I be otherwise and have a heart? Oh, tell me the time will be long to you too, and then I'll go rejoicing!"

"How like a woman!" says Greville, with his small fine smile. "Directly you are sure I shall be perfectly miserable you can be happy. Well, I am thankful my affection is not so selfish. I shall hope you will enjoy every moment in Naples, and will improve every moment also, not only in singing but in good sense. And now had you not better read your letter?"

She opened it with listless fingers. That last speech chilled her. Of course he was right—why should she wish him to be miserable? And yet—one might understand lovers living apart in hopeless longing, but sure if they began to enjoy themselves with others they ceased to be lovers. That was the dilemma.

"It's very kind. He's a kind, good man!"—laying it on Greville's knee. "He says he knows of rooms for

mother and me near his house. But somehow—well, I wish he hadn't thought of it. No, forgive me, Greville. I know I shall be wiser when I've had time to think. I shall have time to think in six months away from my own, own Greville. Six months! It seems like forever and ever."

She rose and went heavily out of the room. It was Greville's perfect equanimity that wounded her most deeply. It would have served his turn better if he had lamented a hard necessity with her. He saw that directly, and when they met again, took her in his arms and said, with deep-toned tenderness:

"And can my Emma who has been all but my wife for near on four years suppose that *I* have no regrets? Because I endeavour to support herself and me with courage does she think that my own heart is not torn?"

She caught him wildly round the neck.

"Oh, Greville, if you suffer, if you love me I can do anything, go anywhere! Could I delay one moment if it helps you! Oh, my dear, November will not be long in coming round and I will work so hard that the minutes will fly, and all will be for my Greville. Give me a pen now, and I'll write to Pliny and tell him I'll go and I'll never forget all his goodness to you. For what am I? All he does is for you and no wonder."

She sat down and wrote eagerly—acceptance. It was done. Weeks had yet to go by, even months, for letters took long to come and go between Italy and England. But it was done and he could begin the gradual severance of all the threads of their interwoven lives.

The little house was put up for sale. Mrs. Cadogan in dire dismay at the prospect of "foreigneering" as she called it, but still faithful to Emma, was bid to prepare herself for voyaging on strange seas.

Next to the parting with Greville what most wrung

Emma's feeling was the good-bye to Romney. She could never forget his pale fixed look the day she broke it to him, with far more than her usual consideration and care.

"How long will it be?" he asked after a pause that seemed endless.

"Why, only till November, Mr. Romney, that's all. You'll be so busy the time will go quick. And I'll write, indeed I will."

"Only till November? But didn't you say Greville joins you there? He won't leave Italy at once. Emma, you deceive me. Tell me the truth. The truth is the best kindness."

"When he comes out, I don't know what he'll choose to do, Mr. Romney. Perhaps it might be a year. But then—"

"It might be ten, twenty!" he cried, with bitter anger. "It might be my sun setting and all my life in darkness once more. You have never known what you are to me. Other men love you and covet your beautiful face, your beautiful body, and they can get no more from you than that. But you were my life and my soul—not as they understand it, but more, far more. You were not a woman; you were Beauty. You taught me my art. When you came divine things came with you that you never even guessed yourself. And now you're going, and everything goes with you. Never in this world will you give any man what you've given me, for he can't take it. Oh, my heart, my heart! I should have known it could not last. What good thing has ever lasted for me!"

She tried to console him but he pushed her away. Romney had moods when all the world seemed a conspiracy of oppression. At last, she got his hand and then little by little wooed him into a greater patience and more tenderness of farewell.

"For you must not come again before you go. Can't

you see it breaks me?" he said, regarding her with hollow eyes of misery. Then slowly:

"And what is the good of a hasty minute. No, no, this is the last, the last!"

He put his hand over his face as if the last farewell had been uttered.

She declared she would not have it so and soon would be returning to him again, more beautiful, more helpful; and so talked until the inexorable clock hand warned her that Greville would be waiting, and then rose to go, afraid as one who has committed a crime.

The grief on his face reflected itself in her own, for she too had her burden to bear. She burst into sobs.

"Oh, Mr. Romney, I'm frightened. I don't want to go. Oh, what, what will it bring to me? I'm losing Greville. I'm losing you. Oh, comfort me or I shall die with terror."

That pulled him into manliness. He steadied and furbished up a pale smile and held himself together until he had calmed her a little. So they parted, she clinging to his hand to the last, and then he stooped and kissed her cheek, and holding the door open saw her go with stooped head and eyes that did not dare to seek him again, while his followed her until the last flutter of her dress was gone round the corner. And then he went back and shut himself in with solitude.

And Greville, too, had his blow a few days before she started. For Sir William wrote to say that on consideration he had allotted a suite of rooms in the Palazzo Sessa to Emma and her mother. They were to be the guests of the Embassy! Greville was frantic with fear and anger. Had the time not been so near, he would have broken up the arrangement altogether sooner than run such a risk. Emma in Sir William's home—her caressing ways forever about him—not put away in a corner like a crime, but

openly acknowledged! Good God, the folly of old men! A madder, more improper arrangement was never suggested. His whole being was unnerved. She would marry some gay young diplomatist, for in the Embassy it would be impossible to keep her away from the society of the many men who were perpetually about, and who could resist such beauty under such auspices? Sir William would be left unguarded to all the matrimonial assaults he dreaded. While, as to Emma, it would turn her head once and for all and make her absolutely insupportable. He genuinely regretted that he had ever entered upon the plan at all; a plan so kindly meant both for Emma and his uncle. He was deeply injured.

He wrote instantly to Hamilton. He warned Emma that she must protest against such a *faux pas* directly she arrived, but, when all was said and done, she would be there almost as soon as the letter, and was far too sunk in grief to consider anything but the separation from Greville. He could make no impression on her with it. She clung to him and fed her eyes on his face, and heard not his words, but the beloved voice that uttered them. What did Sir William's plans matter to her?

And the last Greville saw was that fair face, dumb with sorrow, wild and white, looking at him, suffering, suffering, as the distance widened between them, and the past was past.

He waved a spotless cambric handkerchief. "Poor girl! Poor Emma!" he said compassionately, and then, "If I had guessed that Hamilton would be such a fool—" He was seriously alarmed, indeed.

CHAPTER X

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

Spring comes slowly in England; winter entrenched and relaxing his dominion inch by inch, fighting as he goes with bitter blasts of snowy winds, sharp rains, and cruel seas beating on iron coasts.

Emma had always half loved, half dreaded the spring. Her nature had the glow of ripening suns and mellow harvests, light and warmth shone from her eyes. And this was the climate she needed also for the expansion of every gift and grace. Cold winds froze her loveliness. Cold faces chilled her blood. It is certain that in Greville's temperature, which often fell to zero and never rose above temperate, she could not have blossomed and fruited as she was to do in the South and under adoring eyes. She half loved, half feared him, and believing in her ignorance and dark experience that fear is a necessary part of love had conformed painfully to his strange inverted austerity; and knowing no life outside the small restrictions of Edgware Row dreaded to leave it with the feelings of a child lost in crowded streets. For she was one of those women in whom memory is ill developed and lost in the interests of the present. Sixteen years old when she came to Greville, the recollection of her life at Up Park, of Willett-Payne the faithless sailor, of the darker shadows of London, had long since faded away into happy forgetfulness in the atmosphere of ease and comfort which gradually came to appear the reward of unmerited sufferings. That dawning bliss vanquished all the shadows of the past until they grew dreamlike and scarcely ever disturbed her and when they did could be

repelled with indifference. They had been; they had ceased to be; and certainly had left no mark, she thought, except indeed little Emma, and even her origin had grown vague and inconsiderable in the child-mother's eyes. She existed, a charming blue-eyed baby; what need was there to remember more?

And now this easy, half pagan, half material Emma was transplanted to one of the most voluptuously enervating climates of all the wide world—a place where all English standards and values seemed harsh, unreasonable, Puritanical; where Greville's squeamish maxims of propriety were absurd and life flung its passions to the surface much as Etna and Vesuvius pour forth their lava; where the grapes so soon again ripen to vintage and the earth repairs her wrong with swift and more luxuriant blossom. What strange or evil impulses would be released in her nature?

But of all that future she guessed nothing and no uprooted plant with wounded fibres quivering in cold air could be more drooping and fearful than Emma when she reached the Palazzo Sessa under Gavin Hamilton's escort and with her mother almost as frightened as herself. Gavin had done his best to awaken her interest in the new sights they passed through and the deepening warmth and sunshine as they journeyed south, but in vain. She could scarcely speak. She sat, eating little, dull, heavy, with great unseeing eyes fixed on some inward sight of grief and Gavin, amazed at the small response from a temperament which he had known so vivid, was inclined to think the experiment was likely to fail.

"Master Charles will have her back on his hands in three months if it goes on," he thought. "Hamilton will never endure it if she sits hunched up like this and makes no exertion to please him. Calypso doesn't appear in the least inclined to console herself, and if I know anything

of Hamilton he will very soon weary of the task. Besides, there is always the respectable Mrs. Dickenson."

There was indeed!—Sir William's niece who had acted as hostess at the Embassy since the death of Lady Hamilton. What, what would be her respectable feelings at the irruption of this surprising stranger, and which would conquer, respectability or delight? Delight had certainly the stronger backing in Naples, but yet Gavin could not in his heart do otherwise than accord the final victory to respectability. Sir William was English, all said and done, and must know the girl unworthy of any real sacrifice. He could not himself take her seriously.

But perhaps Gavin knew much less both of Emma and Hamilton than he supposed. For one thing, he undervalued her devotion to Greville. Much of the time when she sat staring dully at the passing show, she was really thinking how she could best forward his interests with his uncle that their reunion might be hastened. At her passionate entreaty he had now named October instead of November, and all her thoughts centred about the autumn. It was selfish, of course, after a fashion, for she was always in the foreground of her own picture, but it was really Greville round whom every idea revolved.

And in his turn Sir William had more tenderness and understanding for her than Gavin or any of his friends. He was thoroughly prepared to find her lonely and unhappy and to endure it until the emptiness was filled with the new joys. He made this very clear in the anxious letter he wrote to Greville a day or two before her arrival. He knew, he said, what must be expected:

"However, I will do as well as I can, and hobble in and out of this pleasant scrape as decently as I can. You may be assured I will comfort her for the loss of you as well as I am able, but I know that I shall have at times many tears to wipe from those charming eyes."

It was her birthday when the long journey was finished and the imposing Palazzo, about to become her home, loomed before her. No, loomed is the wrong word for the white, light brilliance rising beside a blue sea of dipping sparkles and splendours. In England, in April, the daffodils would be blowing in cold showers, the leaves would be tiny on the hedges about Paddington Green. Here summer blazed in what seemed perennial beauty and even her wearied eyes lifted in amazement at a world as new as heaven.

Sir William resolved to meet her in his own house, and this for two reasons. He knew Emma's sensibility, as he called it, and feared some public outburst which should attract attention very unwelcome in their position. Also, he believed that the sight of the preparations made for her would be the first step to her liking, the first assault on the memory of Greville. That could not begin too soon, and he must see it.

Accordingly the visitors, who included Gavin Hamilton, were received at the great entry by the majordomo with what appeared to her an endless train of men and women servants, eager to receive and do homage to those whom the Ambassador delighted to honour.

Her first impulse was something very like terror as she stood in the great sun-dimmed Palazzo with vast chambers stretching away in endless glimpses on either hand. The whole of the Edgware Row house might have been stowed away in the long high-ceiled hall where she stood; a hackney coach might have been driven up the wide shallow stairs. A regiment of soldiers could have been accommodated in the mysterious rooms that spread away to right, to left, above, below. Oh, for the little parlour with Greville's dear figure in sight, and her mother calling from the kitchen and the friendly faces of baker and milkman arriving on their morning rounds, and the little smiling Molly Dring with her carefully tutored "Madam,

breakfast waits." The flashing dark eyes and quick gestures bewildered her horribly, and Mrs. Cadogan was half stupefied beside her; and Gavin Hamilton had been spirited away to some distant apartment of his own; and it was her birthday, her miserable twenty-first birthday, a lost stranger in a foreign land!

A girl called Teresa curtseys before her. Will the Eccellenza ascend to her suite? And she follows, dumb with fear, up those alarming stairs, giving her arm to her mother who stumbles up beside her—two mere English village folk in an Italian palace and as much at home there as cattle.

A door opens, a curtain is raised. Light, warm golden sunlight, softest air, rushes to meet them from wide windows framing the perfect sea, sweet islands swimming on its bosom and, pillaring the sky, a mountain with a hint of terror in the banner of smoke above it, drowsing today in bluest vapours.

But the rooms!—beautiful with a perfection she cannot as yet comprehend. Every detail of luxury planned for her service by one of the most cultivated tastes in Europe. Has a magician waved his wand and will it all dissolve like a dream when she wakes in the morning in that large cool bedroom with its blue hangings, great mirrors to reflect triumphant beauty, and marble, marble everywhere and whispering corridors and doors that dwarf the entrant?

She is to bathe in a Roman marble bath after the long journey, and this strangely beautiful bathroom (the first she has seen) adjoins La Signora Madre's—for to that imposing title has poor Mrs. Cadogan attained! And His Excellency is away on business but will return before long.

And Emma, with a faint thrill of returning life, bathes in luxuriously warmed water, and rises fresh as a swan

new-laved, and braids the wonderful hair and beholds—Lord! what a sight!—hanging in a vast closet dresses of exquisite fineness; "muslin loose to tye with a sash for the hot weather, made like the turkey dresses, the sleeves tyed in foulds with ribbon and trimmed with lace." Such lace, too! Fine as cobwebs and floriated with exquisite stitchery. Even the ribbons were not forgotten, nor the sashes, the very blue that turned her eyes violet, the faint rose that matched her own roses, the delicate Parma violet that she chose on days when her eyes must match the mauve hat which Greville gave her the birthday before this. Oh, goodness and kindness unparalleled! But how had he known her height, her waist? Ah, that was Greville! He—he had written, so that nothing might be wanting. It was always his goodness. He had devised this Paradise for her that she might not be forlorn while he—her dear lonely Greville—must be hard at work in Scotland and Wales, retrenching, saving for their happy meeting. Then what could she do but her utmost to reward the kind Sir William for having fallen into Greville's views? No, she would not cry. She would show that she too had courage and could endure for his sake as Greville was enduring for hers. She dashed the fresh cold water against her tired eyes until her cheeks bloomed again. She tied her favourite blue ribbon through the matchless auburn hair at which the servants had stared in a delighted surprise that made itself felt. She boldly chose the foamiest dress of all, and a long sash of softest silken blue, and when Teresa knocked at the door, instead of hiding her head ashamed and vanquished she bade her enter in good stout English, and stood to have her sash tied on, and the cloudy folds of muslin shaken out, and then posed radiant before the mirror prepared to go forth and conquer in Greville's cause.

La Signora Madre was put safely to bed, too bewildered

for any refuge but the laced pillows, and terrified even of those. A village blacksmith's wife and come to this! What it is to be the mother of a beauty! A black-browed Giulia held her in awe and arrested her temptation to cling to Emma and beseech to be taken home on the earliest opportunity, and at last she sank into a wearied sleep which carried her back on the swifter wings of dream to the little kitchen in Edgware Row.

Emma went out into the spacious room where the casements commanded one of the rememberable views of Europe—sea and land bathing in glory that uplifted earth to heaven and made them one, blue Capri beyond her, the noble curve of the coast from Sorrento onward.

And this was the world, and this was life for the rich and great; and she herself a part of it. Oh, if he had been there her soul would have escaped into the radiance like a bird floating in serene joy on deeps of azure air, half sleeping, half waking in a sunny ecstasy.

That mood passed and she looked down and marvelled at the gaily chattering streets crowded with many-coloured people in dresses that reminded her of a masquerade once seen at Vauxhall. Could those women be living their actual life in brilliant short bodices bright with gold, and full skirts black-banded with velvet that showed smart ankles and white stockings? No, surely. The conductor would raise his stick and the band strike up and away they would all go with a "Tra la la," and linking hands and dancing feet to the strain of a merry measure. The drop scene suggested it—the sea. Vesuvius. Yes, and the men matched the women, as noisy and gay, as absurdly brilliant in ribbons and splashes of colour.

She was amusing herself idly with all this, and thinking it the strangest birthday that had ever befallen any girl, when there came a soft little tap at the door; a friendly, hesitating tap. She turned and, catching her breath,

halted a second, irresolute, and then ran to the door, the white soft muslin billowing out about her like a blossoming flower. It opened almost timidly as she came, and a very well-known voice said through the opening, "Emma, child! May I come in?"

It opened wide and Sir William stood on the threshold, then closed it quietly after him. One instant she stood, doubting the manner of reception, turning her head half away from him with an indescribable feeling. Did instinct whisper a warning? If so, it was silent next minute, and she sprang to him all gratitude and affection.

"Dear, dear Sir William, I've been waiting, longing for you to come that the poor Emma might thank you for all this wonderful goodness. Don't I know it isn't for my sake but for Greville's, and don't I love you the more for that! Oh, if I must be away from him where could I wish to be but in your house and sharing your fatherly goodness? My more than father, I thank you with all my heart and soul."

And with a daring that surprised herself she put up her face and timidly offered a niecely kiss.

If Sir William winced at the "fatherly" he did not show it nor belie the ascription. Holding her hand he led her to a chair and took another beside her, and drew the talk dexterously away from moving subjects.

And there on the right was Posilippo. Was it not a dream of beauty? And turn this way: Villa Reale; that is the Royal Palace where the King and Queen live—the Queen, daughter to the great Empress Maria Theresa. And see how we are guarded: Uovo and Nuovo, the great fort-dragons to protect the Sleeping Beauty, Naples! And that is San Elmo beyond. Yes, and Emma shall be taken in our own boat to enjoy the shining city from the shining sea. Will she enjoy it? Will she be content and happy?

"I will, I will indeed!" cries Emma stoutly, and straightway bursts into tears.

"For it's my birthday," she sobs, "and I'm very low away from him. Oh, Sir William, he would always stay at home that day and smile on me, and be so good. Oh, to think that *this* day I should be so far from him. I don't see as how I can live till October, for October it must be, if not September. My birthday! and no word from him."

She looked up terrified, drowned in tears, lest she should have done some harm to Greville with these lamentations —and the rudeness too, when so much trouble had been taken for her!

"Forgive me!" she said, panting still with sobs, and leaning instinctively towards him for support and help.

"Forgive you, my dear Emma, when you yourself know the bond between your Greville and me! Could I respect you as I do if you could leave him without a regret? But your birthday is not forgotten, never shall be while you grace my roof. Look here!"

He dried the tears with the little cobweb of a handkerchief on her knee, and put a wet curl tenderly back behind her ear; even stooped and kissed the soft wet lashes as if she had been a child.

"Look now, do you see anything in the room that doesn't belong to it; that isn't furniture, that isn't ornament, that isn't beautiful in itself, but may hold something charming for all that? Look well and be sure!"

She brightened like a doubtful moon in clouds, and looked about her still holding his hand. She was a little young daughter now with a kind indulgent father. That was what she felt herself in every fibre, and played the part to admiration. A box, long and shallow, with the fold of a silk curtain lying across it as if partly to hide it. That was the intruder. She pointed with the disen-

gaged hand as if it were part of a charming game and drew him towards it.

"I can't wait! What is it?" she said in a whisper.

"Guess!" he said in a whisper that matched hers. It was as if the two were baffling, tantalizing each other.

"You shan't see until you pay me!"

An answering sparkle dipped in her eyes.

"Oh, but, Sir William, you don't approve paying until I've seen it's worth payment? No, I will, I *must* see first!"

"Will you swear to be honest and pay afterwards?"

"Not if I don't like it. Will you swear I shall?"

"I swear on my honour. I'll throw it out of window if you don't, and ask for nothing."

It was a delightful moment. She looked up at the tall handsome man, his hair scarcely grey beneath the powder, the star of the Order of the Bath shining on his left breast, for he had been at the Palace, and it was absolute enchantment to find she could thus hold and charm him. Walking almost on tiptoe she approached the box.

The strings had been undone, the cover was ready for the lifting. She raised it and only a thin sheet of paper lay between her and a revelation. Looking archly back at him she lifted that also, and then clasped her hands with a little scream of delight.

A gown—a beautiful, a wonderful gown, such as she had never seen in all her life—a gown of ivory-white satin, pure as the petals of a water lily, and painted by hand with garlands and groups of flowers most cunningly disposed to set off girlish curves and flushes. A wonderful piece of art in her eyes, a wonderful enhancement to beautifullest beauty, a sheer delight.

"It is Indian work!" said Sir William, and was not even heard, she so gloated on it, delicately raising a fold, touching the ruffled sleeve with awe and fairy fingers that scarcely brushed it. He repeated his words.

"Indian!" she said at last in a low breathless voice, and again was silent. Then turned with her soul in her eyes.

"I choke when I would thank you. What words can I find? Oh, you good kind friend! Indeed I will love and serve you all my days. And this is for Greville's sake, for what have I ever done or could do to deserve it? Pay you—indeed I will, and gladly!"

And flung her arms about his neck and bestowed a little shower of hearty kisses on his elderly cheek. Sweet it might be and was, but scarcely complimentary in the deeper sense, for Greville was in every kiss. Still it was a good beginning and all that could be expected. And then she must know the price and quake when she was reluctantly told twenty-five guineas, which, indeed, was a high price for that time and place. And then the talk slid into glowing descriptions of the future and how Galluci, the world-famed singing-master, was to come next day to begin tuition, and how he had promised the King—the King, mark you!—that he should see her Attitudes when a few more had been planned for which Sir William had ideas which he was burning to discuss with her. And how—

But this can be imagined, and how the warm cordiality, the generous kindness and admiration touched her heart. If one considers it, this Emma had been rifled but never wooed. Willett-Payne, Fetherstonehaugh, had plundered her and with the roughness of freebooters. She had flung herself on Greville's half-reluctant compassion and such wooing as had passed between them was on her side, and coldly accepted often enough. He was Olympian, remote, at best. But this great gentleman wooed her; at first, she believed, as a frightened child is wooed by a kind guardian, but certainly with passionate admiration of charms which if Greville had noticed he never dwelt on: and every grace responded as snow-drenched

flowers lift their heads to the sun. He had the gift, practised on so many women, to make her feel herself enchanting, and the more she felt it the more she charmed and captured him.

But, for all, when he went away to send a word to England of her coming, even with her eyes on the white satin gown, that kind voice in her ear, she sat and sighed for the lost lover and would have given all for one sight of his cold smile, one touch of his reluctant hand.

CHAPTER XI

ADVANCE AND RETREAT

Sir William for the first time in his life fell in love. Her smile curled about his heart, her maidenly advances and retreats enchanted him. In vain Greville, not daring to write his indignation at the Embassy arrangement, shot little shafts of caution and warning. They were unheeded. Lalage, sweetly laughing, sweetly speaking, was beside him and letters were trifles. He persuaded himself that Greville had never understood her and that he did; mere conjectures then might be put smilingly aside.

In careful French, lest it should by any chance come under her prying eyes, Greville wrote to the rash man, as he considered him:

"If one admits the tone of virtue without its reality one is simply duped, and I naturally see everything in its true light as I have always done." Sir William thought, but did not retort, that Greville's utter lack of idealism entirely unfitted him for judging an inspiration like Emma's; that—oh, fallacy of lovers!—the body might be debauched and dragged through the mire and the white maiden soul sit smiling secure in its fastness. That is, of course, in *Emma's* case, hers only. At such a possibility for any other woman he himself would have laughed with Greville. His replies evaded those points that were full of real anxiety as to her happiness. Did Greville believe her faithful heart could ever change from its devotion to him? What could

be done to wean her from that hopeless passion? It was clear there could be no hope for any other man unless it disappeared, and he was sure that the shock when she knew the facts would be dreadful. Greville, horrified at her being so seriously taken, wrote back under the difficulty that his praises of Emma now recoiled on himself. If he had dwelt on her absence of coquetry, her freedom from giddiness, her strong good sense, how was he now to convey the caution that she was merely a woman of easy virtue and the more dangerous because of her extraordinary attractions? He felt himself involved in contradictions, but did his best. And first he reassured Sir William.

"I shall hope to manage all to our satisfaction, for I so long foresaw that a moment of separation must arrive that I never kept the connexion but on a footing of perfect liberty to her. Its commencement was not of my seeking. In her heart she cannot reproach me of having acted otherwise than a kind attentive friend. But you have now rendered it possible for her to be respected and comfortable and, if she has not talked herself out of the true view of her situation, she will retain the protection and affection of us both (!). For after all, consider what a charming creature she would have been if she had been blessed with the advantage of an early education, and had it not been spoilt by the indulgence of every caprice! I never was irritated by her momentary passions, and yet it is true that when her pride is hurt by neglect or anxiety for the future, the frequent repetition of her passion balances the beauty of her smiles. Knowing all this, infinite have been my pains to make her respect herself and I had always proposed to remain her friend altho' the connexion ceased. If Mrs. Wells had quarrell'd with Admiral Keppell she would never have been respected as she now is."

Mrs. Wells hovered as so fair a dream before the eyes of Greville's morality that one might well desire the acquaintance of that paragon. But since she has not survived in history save as a possible example to Emma, and Emma herself made history, it may be granted that the two ladies had perhaps very little in common and that Emma could not have been a Wells with all her efforts. She did, at one time, try her best and failed. It is also an odd reflection that Greville himself, the great, the highly descended, remains in human memory solely because Emma once dwelt in his house in Edgware Row on her way to more celestial spheres. So incredible to Greville-minds are the impish freaks and caprices of that Muse of History whom the besotted ancients treated with as much veneration as if she had been a sensible woman!

Sir William put this clever letter smilingly aside, as I have said. Greville's motives and contradictions were perfectly clear to him, and the more confirmed his belief that Emma was a soul unspoilt. He accordingly proceeded to do his best to spoil her. Every day was devoted to her interest and amusement.

"You cannot add perfume to a rose, but you can add lustre to a diamond by cutting, polishing, setting, and my diamond ['Greville's!' she interjected] shall have every chance to glitter with the best." So he told her, and catching the interjection, added, "And now when Greville comes he shall stare in amazement to see the improvement in what most men would think could not be improved." That last sentence was sufficient for her. She outran Sir William in her diligence from that moment.

Galluci came every morning and the house was like a nest of larks for two hours. The wondering Neapolitan noblemen who visited him were convinced Sir William's new mistress, for such was her reputation, must be an

established prima donna and looked through the journals daily to see what star had shot from its firmament to temporary obscurity for his sweet sake. Indeed, her progress confounded Sir William and Galluci who were both of them inclined to set nature at nought and lean wholly on art. The eighteenth century, like Greville, was unkind to nature. Even a simple shepherdess must be hooped and garlanded and become a Phyllis or a Chloe before she could be agreeable in eyes polite.

The dancing-master followed Galluci daily, and Sir William would look into the room to see Emma at her dancing and deportment. Daily she gained in suave dignity. She could enter a room with the best in a fortnight, make the whole range of curtseys from the deep reverential which one day might be useful at court, to the slight supercilious warranted to kill impertinence on the spot. She walked stately in the minuet—but why catalogue? Because it was Emma, she must needs learn the country dances; indeed, she picked these up from the maids, and very soon excelled in the tarantella and other such joys of the people, rendering them with an added grace which made Sir William's guests marvel why they had never thought them worth notice before.

Sir William's guests? What had Emma, or her like, to do with them? Much. Mrs. Dickenson was vanquished. From her charming house in Naples whence she had issued to do the honours when Sir William received, she heard of the new arrival, and in no uncertain terms. Her history, losing nothing in the telling, was spread before Mrs. Dickenson's chaste eyes and almost scorched them. It had been carefully concealed from the ladies of the family that Greville had made a home in Edgware Row and though no one expected him to be more austere than other young men of the period it was felt that he offered an example which seniors and juniors

would alike do well to follow. There was therefore nothing to connect him with the idea of Emma, though, as regards her past, Gavin Hamilton, delicately threshed with feminine flail and fan in Naples, yielded some precious grains of information which sprang up green and full-eared in Neapolitan conversations, and did not even know that he had done it.

Sir William—the astute, the worldly wise!—was he deceived or deceiving? Mrs. Dickenson bided her time. It came inevitably with the expected request that she should take the head of his table on the occasion of a large dinner party with music to follow.

Music! Mrs. Dickenson pricked up her ears. Those lark-like trillings had already reached them in rumour. She answered that it would be best if Sir William would call and discuss the arrangements with her.

Unthinking man, he went! Conscious of innocence and of a heart—but that at least should not concern Mrs. Dickenson in his opinion—he went.

She received him with the duty of a niece who had grown up more or less in his shadow and who could appreciate the dignity of an ambassador in the family, and made the suitable beginning in enquiries after his health and the news by mail, and finishing with the weather launched discreetly into the subject of the dinner.

"I thank you very sincerely, my dear uncle, for your wish that I should do the honours as usual. Nothing could give me more pleasure."

"Then it is settled, my dear," he said briskly, "the hour is as usual. The guests—"

"But—" said Mrs. Dickenson with emphasis, and that awful syllable, the grave of so many reputations, fell chill on his ear. He rose hurriedly.

"I see you have a cold. Indeed, I would not be incon-

siderate. I know you have often helped me at great inconvenience to yourself."

"And would again and evermore," said Mrs. Dickenson in her deep contralto. "But—" Again a pause.

"Pray speak plainly. What is it?"

His face was a mask of genial innocence, calm as if all the Christian virtues shed their benignant sunshine through his eyes. It was Mrs. Dickenson who looked uncomfortably conscious.

"Well, my dear uncle, I will perform a duty which I find most painful. How can I with any self-respect enter the Palazzo Sessa when I am told there is a young girl there unconnected with the family, extremely young and beautiful, with the manners of an actress, and who has been presented only to your *male* friends? Pray view my position candidly."

The hot sun beat on the jalousies and filtered through the blinds. The room was, however, dim and cool with shade and the rich perfume of flowers, and there was no external cause for the little elderly flush which coloured Sir William's cheeks. She observed it and drew her own conclusions. However, he did not hesitate, though his countenance fell.

"You and I should be used to the virulent gossip of Naples by this time. There is nothing to hide, and you are at liberty to hear the circumstances and judge for yourself. Mrs. Hart is a young woman of the utmost merit and talents. She is in poor circumstances and has been recommended to me by a friend that she may study singing with Galluci and fit herself for the operatic stage. It could not be done to the same advantage in England. You know that as well as I. And therefore I extended hospitality to her and to her mother; a most worthy, excellent woman. Of course I knew that my motives would

be misrepresented. When is it ever otherwise? But you are now acquainted with all the facts, and in case you have a very natural delicacy in asking the question, I will tell you once and for all, there is nothing whatever between me and Mrs. Hart."

"What are her antecedents?" asked Mrs. Dickenson, coldly overlooking this assurance. Sir William's mental vision swiftly embraced Up Park, Edgware Row, and a few more memories before he answered firmly:

"A quiet respectable home in London with her mother. This is the chance of her life. But come and judge yourself of her uncommon talents. With your love of music I am certain they will delight you, and your countenance would be invaluable for her."

There was a pause while Mrs. Dickenson marshalled her words and ideas.

"My dear uncle, it is impossible you should realize the scandal that is going about. If you did, how can I doubt that you would make some other arrangement for the young woman? In a dissolute court like this you will hear no objection from the Royalties or nobility, but there are worthy English people here who will undoubtedly report the matter in London—"

"Damn them and their officiousness!"

"—and it may have very unpleasant results," proceeded Mrs. Dickenson calmly, "so that I feel I cannot, in view of my daughters, in any way encourage what may be very harmful to you and all the family. I don't speak of higher motives but they exist in all their fulness."

Perhaps there is nothing more irritating to the average man than a highly moral attack descending like a flail on a harmless pleasure. Whatever were his hopes for the future the situation was still innocent, and it was nothing less than maddening to have Emma at home, bathed in tears and writing passionate love letters to Greville,

and Mrs. Dickenson here upbraiding him with illicit relations which would have filled Emma with as much disgust as herself. He lost his temper between the pair of them.

"Commend me to the really pure-minded female for licentious suggestions," he said, rising with sarcastic decision. "I had thought better of your good sense. If an elderly man cannot show compassion to a girl young enough to be his granddaughter without these unpleasant insinuations he had better not lay himself open to such attacks. I wish you a very good morning."

Mrs. Dickenson started towards him with a cry. The word "marriage" was tolling in her ear, and she the sole family representative to arrest this fatal folly! Oh, if Greville, the cool, the worldly-wise, the influential with his uncle, were but here! That was her thought.

"Oh, uncle, did you but know what is flying about, and how it may be represented in England! You despise me as a woman. Consult Greville, I entreat you, before it goes farther. You know his calm good sense. Write by the mail that leaves to-day. He will tell you—"

"Damn Greville!" cries Sir William, now exasperated in the highest degree. "And damn all who interfere in matters which do not concern them and never will! I free you, madam, henceforward from the unpleasant duty of assisting my hospitalities, and have nothing further to beg of you but that our meetings may be as infrequent as you please."

He stalked out and left Mrs. Dickenson weeping on the settee. The poor lady had but done her duty, and here was the reward.

He went straight up to Emma's apartments, where she sat, industriously sketching by the great window overlooking the bay. He stood a moment by the door and watched her, and though she was conscious of it she never stirred but went quietly on with her work.

All in her favorite white, young, lovely, sweet, she looked like a wood nymph compared with Mrs. Dickenson's stout and unattractive British maternity. She rose before him florid and suspicious, the stiff silk gown crackling about her stout person, a cap all loops and frills and ribbon, with rolled curls to front her unattractive coiffure. A thievish sunbeam had made its way through a half-closed jalousie and was playing hide and seek in the auburn gold of Emma's curls. It touched the mother-of-pearl of a little ear, listening, though he never guessed it, for the quick breath due to such industrious loveliness. It rushed on him then— Why not make Emma the lady of the Palazzo, the dispenser of his hospitalities? Why not as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb? They could not say worse than they were saying; then let them talk as they would and he would go his own way. Where in the broad earth could he find such another hostess? The charm of his parties would echo through Italy, and London was far away. These thoughts and many more all crystallizing into resolution stirred in him as he stood and watched that sunbeam touch the warm rose of her cheek and quiver about her lips. Suddenly she turned, smiled, and said sweetly:

"I felt you were there. It's like sunshine in the room when you come. Tell me if this is any better?"

She held up the sketching block, and he sat down beside her commenting and commending. Then, resolutely:

"Emma, I have a dinner party to-night. I wish you to appear."

"Me? Oh, Sir William!" she looked at him in dismay. "Ladies? But I've never dined with ladies in my life, and I don't know how to act."

"You can't do anything but gracefully. There are only two Italian ladies, from Rome. The rest are men. Twelve in all. I wish you to receive them."

"But I can't talk Italian yet. Though I'm getting on."

"Perhaps that may be all the better for a beginning and till you grow more accustomed. I'll make your excuses. And you shall sing after dinner."

Her face went pale and red.

"Sir William, you believe in me too much. I shall disgrace you."

"Not you. You'll rise to the occasion and cover us with glory. You have the courage of six. Now that's fixed. Come down simply, quietly, naturally, and I won't say look pretty, because you can't help that. But be just the simple natural Emma, and all will go well."

"But, what shall I wear? Oh, I want to be beautiful to do you credit."

As it was not possible for Sir William to explain that that was the high road to discredit for him, he fell in with her view and after awhile the white satin was chosen. She had never worn it yet, and that was in itself an event to move her. At the end, she hesitated a little.

"Is Mrs. Dickenson ill?" she asked simply, for she knew from him that his real niece had always done the honours. Sir William's lips tightened.

"Not at all. But I choose that in future my dear Emma shall be hostess at the Palazzo Sessa."

No more was said. She could not tell whether she were more frightened or glad. Perhaps he meant it as a part of the great campaign of improvement now proceeding. She was to be given the manners of a lady in high society in addition to all else. Wonderful, wonderful! For what dim illustrious future was all this preparation? Surely, surely he must have her marriage to Greville in view. Nothing else could possibly explain it. Then what effort or gratitude could be too much for such amazing generosity? When he was gone she caught up her pen and wrote to Greville. All centred about that.

"I try to appear as cheerful before Sir William as I can, but I am sure to cry the moment I think of you. For I feel more and more unhappy at being separated from you, and if my fatal ruin depends on seeing you, I will and *must* at the end of the summer. For to live without you is impossible. I love you to that degree that at this time there is not a hardship upon earth either of poverty, cold, death, or even to walk barefooted to Scotland to see you but what I would undergo. Therefore my dear, dear Greville, if you do love me, for my sake, try all you can to come here as soon as possible. You have a true friend in Sir William and he will be happy to see you. I find it is not either a fine horse or a fine coach or a pack of servants or plays or operas can make me happy. It is *you* that has it in your power either to make me very happy or very miserable."

She paused here, recalled a something in Sir William's eyes that had startled her. To him she could not say a word, not a word. She might, *must* be utterly mistaken, and doing him a frightful injustice. But to Greville she could open her whole heart. With desperate courage she snatched up the pen again.

"I respect Sir William. I have a great regard for him, as the uncle and friend of you, and he loves me, Greville. But he can never be anything nearer to me than your uncle and my sincere friend. He never can be my lover. You do not know how good Sir William is to me. He is doing everything he can to make me happy."

She sealed and bound that letter with extraordinary care. Little could she think or guess that it would be returned after careful consideration from Greville for Sir William's consideration also. Her motive in writing it

was perfectly clear. Greville must know and rejoice in the thought that neither temptation, pleasures, or love could shake her perfect fidelity to him. He had come to her rescue in need, they had lived together in wifely submission and love on her side for years. She considered herself his wife in truth and hoped that the future would make her so in the world's eyes. For that she was toiling now; that he might never have cause to blush for her bearing and accomplishments. Poor Emma! it was perhaps natural that she should put the shameful past out of sight. It had not hurt her, she thought, or Sir William could not respect her as he did. And if she could forget it, why not Greville? Only he must be certain that she was true as the needle to the North even if the incredible were to happen and Sir William to tempt her.

She pushed the sealed letter aside, then sent it to the mail and sat awhile thinking. Sir William saw her enter the room before his guests arrived, divinely lovely in the shimmering white satin and a little rope of knotted seed pearls about her round throat. With all the delight of a proud proprietor he watched the eyes of the men who entered and were ceremoniously presented. He saw the two olive-skinned Italian ladies thrown into the shade by that immaculate fairness. Her manners were the perfection of a young girl's modesty, and her ignorance of Italian kept her in a graceful quiet of smiles and shyness. It was in the evening her triumph came when Galluci appeared with his music and Emma placed herself beside him too shy even for apologies and excuses. She sang Paisiello brilliantly. She fired off ascending rockets of silver stars that fluttered to earth again as silvery. The applause of the inflammable Italians was frantic, and her pretty bow and smile completed the picture.

Directly the two ladies rose she attended them to the door and vanished discreetly with them.

"Perfection!" said Sir William in his heart. "Thank goodness I acted as I did to-day."

But what would Greville have said? It was Emma who asked that question in her own heart. Sir William evaded it in his.

CHAPTER XII

THE BEGINNING

That dinner party was the opening of her triumph. The guests spread her fame abroad, her beauty, modesty, fresh spontaneous charm, and above all, her exquisite singing. Not that the modesty was likely to blind the keen-sighted, laughing Neapolitans to her ambiguous position in the Ambassador's house. Sir William's amatory character was far too well established, but nothing could have mattered less in that land of easy pleasure, and neither she nor Sir William were thought a whit the worse in a city where every attractive woman had at least one *cavaliere servente*, in addition to a husband in attendance on some other lady. The Italian ladies made polite overtures. The Queen herself, as easy-moralled as any of them, expressed her curiosity and interest in the new enchantress at the Embassy, and though no definite Royal approach could possibly be made, Sir William knew that he had a successor in the Queen's intimacy and there would be no anger, no unpleasant representations made through diplomatic channels to the English Court, where Queen Charlotte, who took an extremely Puritan view of such amusements, might very well prejudice him with his royal foster brother, King George.

Sir William trod on roses. His sails were filled by softest breezes from Parthenope. He had never been so happy in his life. All that could interest and delight him was centred in his own house, and all Naples was on tiptoe to see and envy him the possession of this new and miraculous beauty. Her history was, of course, unknown. Any vul-

garities of English speech were drowned in her musical broken Italian, of which, indeed, she gathered up the fragments every day, for her quick intelligence told her that it must be the foundation stone of her success. Every day found her chattering Italian, writing it, reading at the neighbouring convent of Santa Romita. A whole romance, not unflavoured with irony, might be written of Emma among the nuns, but she never had the perception of incongruity and was absolutely at home there. Daily she practised her music, and laboured at her Attitudes, for Sir William foresaw a great future for them in her personal triumph. The homely Signora Madre was provided with a wardrobe of sober elegance and figured at the Embassy entertainments also, a respectable foil to her brilliant daughter. Fortunately ignorance of Italian closed her mouth on the vulgarisms and provincialisms that would have been Greville's despair in London if he had not kept the kitchen door resolutely closed when he was in the house, and seated on a sofa with kindly smiles and nods to all the presentations, her elderly comeliness did quite as well as could be expected and lent a false air of chaperonage to the proceedings. Emma's goodnature would never fail her mother. She rejoiced to see her in such magnificence, felt that her own life must have really been praiseworthy to have achieved it and could have bathed in a sea of bliss but that—Greville never wrote.

She wrote more passionately by every mail, terribly uneasy, and for more reasons than one. Greville was hers, hers; neither fate nor any other woman should rob her of him. Habit, gratitude, every emotion bad and good in her emotional being, held her to him. She would not, could not lose him. And then also, all this glittering new life had been planned by him, based on his care for her. Suppose he did not come in the autumn, might it not all

fall and vanish like the fairy gold which changes into withered leaves?

"Greville, my dear Greville, wright some comfort to me. Only remember your promise of October."

That was her cry. Until October—for she clung to October now—was safely come and gone she could feel no security.

While all was well on the surface there were signs and omens. The English women who lived in Naples were holding sternly aloof, influenced, very naturally, by Mrs. Dickenson. That frightened her when she had a moment to think. Mrs. Dickenson would write to the family, the mighty Hamiltons, and who could tell that a detachment might not raid Naples and carry off either Sir William or herself to respectability or ignominy if Greville were not there to protect her? Without him it could not last. Sensible and foolish fears alike pressed her, and Greville the only cure.

It is true that the men were ready enough to join in the delightful gaieties of the charming young hostess, and as to the Neapolitans and the visitors of every land, they flocked to the Palazzo Sessa, which so far was reassuring. To be invited was the last touch of fashion in Naples. Indeed, it was not surprising. Sir William had always been a cosmopolitan host, with all the ease and gaiety of manner to win the Southern heart, and she seconded him to a miracle. No one could resist her sweet frank manners, the untutored kindliness of her beautiful eyes. They did much mischief, whether willingly or unwillingly who shall say?

But triumph after triumph crowned her. Even the King—the dissipated King, between whom and his Queen was no bond of fidelity on either side—fixed his fickle fancy for a moment on Emma, lovely in the blue hat she had entreated Greville to send her. Could she doubt it?—

especially on that evening when Hamilton took her to dine with a gay party at his new Villa Emma at Posilippo; her own villa it might be called since it carried her name. And lo, in the twinkling lights outside and the golden moonlight, a boat creeps up to the casements, shadowy, silent, and an ugly attractive face looks in. What! The King! Hamilton springs to his feet. The King? Will he come in? No, it is time to go. Half a dozen men rush to fetch Emma's *cachemire* and dispute as to who shall put it about her shoulders, and as they leave the door and emerge into the moonlight that spiritualizes her beauty with something unearthly fine and fair, they find the royal boat drawn up beside the Ambassador's, and the "music" stationed in the bows strikes up a soft serenade to the English beauty—"eyes of light, smile of dawn" and so forth, a delightful flattery indeed. Royalty must be thanked. Sir William delays the plunge of his oars, and she is presented to His Majesty who bows, hand on heart, and laments that he cannot speak English. Emma, trembling with awe and pleasure, utters a few words of Italian—"Not so bad as might have been expected"—and the King receives them as the music of the youngest of the angels, and again the French horns salute the conquering smile, and the boats move off together, keeping time with oars whence fall the dripping moonlight diamonds, and so they drift softly back to Naples on a sea that is more of heaven than of earth, and the King's hand touching Emma's as it rests on the gunwale, speaks a language which she knows very well how to decipher.

A few days later she writes again to Greville:

"The king as eyes, he as a heart, and I have made an impression upon it. But I told the prince [Dietrichstein] that Hamilton is my friend and she belongs to his nephew. For all our friends know it."

Loyalty thus expresses itself in grammar that will ap-

pal Greville on its reception and yet give him a warning that beauty he neglected can yet enthral others; and those others not to be lightly spoken of even by a Greville! There was a note of sombre triumph in that sentence which he understood. He sent the letter at once to Hamilton. Everything which could show Emma alive to the attentions of other men would convince Hamilton of the truth of Greville's statement that the semblance of virtue without its reality is utterly untrustworthy. He was the more eager about this because there was a tone of consideration, of—could it be?—*respect* for the girl in Hamilton's letters which frightened him. Mrs. Dickenson's report, also, was not calming.

Meanwhile, in the warm languor of the south and with this heavy anxiety upon her, she flagged a little, visibly. She was exercising her brain as it had never been exercised in her life; knowledge, experience, accomplishments, all crowding in upon her. She who had been a despised nobody, subsisting on Greville's cold favours, had now not only Sir William's scarcely hidden adoration, but the King perpetually in her train, eager for a word, a look; letters, gifts, offers, rained in upon her. For a while she swam exultingly on the blue wave of success; then, physically wearied, it threatened to drown her. How could she wear her laughing mask always—she, so little to the manner born, and with this gnawing anxiety at her heart?

She sat one morning by the great casement looking out into the soft haze, all opalescent and pearl grey that veiled Posilippo and made Capri dim as a dream of heaven. The sea was breathless—still: its bosom scarcely heaved. A warm enervating languor enfolded the world and imposed its own quiet. She had just finished a letter to Greville and sent it off, for she wrote generally in the early morning, and now her drawing lay before her and

her listless hand on that, wearied with pleasure and anxiety. For still Greville had not written—no, not a word, and it was now July. The hat she asked for had come, but as an order might be fulfilled by a stranger. Was he ill, estranged, mad? For he had not written even to Hamilton, as she was told, yet scarcely could believe. So she wrote again:

"My ever dearest Greville, I am now onely writing to beg you for God's sake to send me one letter if it is onely a farewell. Sure I have deserved this for the sake of the love you once had for me. Think, Greville, of our former connexion and don't despise me. I have not used you ill in any one thing. I have been from you going of six months. So pray let me beg of you, my much loved Greville, only one line from your dear, dear hands. For if you knew the misery I feel, oh, your heart would not be intirely shut up against me for I love you with the truest affection. Don't let anybody sett you against me. Greville, you will never meet with anybody that has a truer affection for you than I have. As soon as I know your determination I will take my own measures. If I don't hear from you and that you are coming I shall be in England at Christmass at farthest. I will see you once more for the last time. Oh, my heart is entirely broke. Then for God's sake, my ever dear Greville, do write me some comfort. I have a language-master, a singing-master, musick, etc., but what is it for? If it was to amuse you I should be happy. I am poor, helpless and forlorn."

She had paused there. Could it be he feared that her new experiences had spoilt her, made her expensive and covetous? She snatched her pen again; she implored him to let her come, to give her only a "guiney" a week for all expenses and she would be satisfied so long as she

could be with him, and so sent the letter off, and relaxed with a long sigh.

The door, the soft tap she knew so well, and Sir William entering, healthy and well preserved after his morning swim in the tepid water; eager to see his flower, grown so lovely now and still so unattainable that he was compelled to assure himself every now and then she was still there, even as a miser counts his gold.

"And how does my Emma this morning? Tired after last night's excitement? Prince Dietrichstein told me two things which will interest you. First, that in Vienna where, as you know, all the great singers come and go, he had never heard anything that moved him so much as your singing of 'Per pieta'; second, that the Queen has heard so much of your beauty and talents that she means to be in the gardens on Thursday to study you for herself. What does my little Emma say to those two pieces of news?"

He put a caressing hand on the hand with its fine cameo ring which lay on the drawing. She sighed softly and did not draw it away.

"Wonderful. What don't I owe to you and Greville's goodness! Are you satisfied with me, my kind, kind friend?"

It would not be Emma if she did not put forth every lure to win every heart, Greville or no Greville. She swayed towards him as naturally as a blossoming bough on a breeze.

"I'm tired; languid. I suppose it's the warm damp heat," she said, "and, oh, Sir William, the anxiety. Why, why doesn't he write? You and he have many friends in England. Do they say anything of him?"

"Emma, my dear, why will you ask what pains me to tell and you to hear? I entreat you to keep silence on that point. You ask if I am satisfied. I am satisfied

even to adoration. To have you with me, to surround you with all in my power to give you, is to me a heaven on earth."

"You are good, you are dear. Then why shall I not love you?" she murmured, pressing closer against his side. "But Greville? I beseech you tell me what you hear of him. My mind would be more settled. I could bear it better. Tell me the truth." Her breath caressed him.

He hesitated, then resolved.

"Emma, is mine the hand that ought to wound you? You force it on me. But since you will have it, I hear of his attentions to a young lady of fortune in London."

Dead silence. Only a trembling against his side. He tried to see her face but could not, for it was buried upon his shoulder. She had turned into his arms to meet the blow. That touched him to delight. A minute went by slowly. Then, in a choked whisper:

"But he is coming in October. If I see him again—"

"Coming in October?" Sir William's voice had the ring of genuine astonishment. "He has never said so to me. There was some light talk in April of his coming out later, but I never heard a word more. Do you know that for certain? Has he said so?"

Dead silence again. Then, at long last, a muttered "No."

"Then what do you build on, my child?"

"Nothing." The one word had the ring of despair. The air was hot and heavy, the hidden sun burning behind leaden clouds that promised thunder. They sat silent, he holding her and seeing nothing but her bowed bright head.

"Emma," he said tenderly, "I think you deceive yourself about Greville. Not that I blame him, nor, I am sure,

will you. He is a poor man, heavily dipped. What is he to do; how can he support you?"

"I would live on a crust with him!" the muffled voice interrupted.

"Yes. But men don't accept such sacrifices from women. And if he marries—have you thought of that? And have you thought, dearest angel, my most lovely, that if he does you are not alone? That there is a man who loves you, who would give all he has for your smiles, who will cherish you in his bosom while life is left to him! Emma, Emma!"

She drew herself slowly away with her hands against his breast and stared at him in mute horror and amazement. More moved than he could have believed possible, he caught her repelling hands and held them clasped in his.

"My adored Emma, I have grown to love you more passionately and tenderly than ever Greville did or can. You are the sunshine of my life and here I swear never to fail or forsake you. Can you not forget Greville's coldness and his faithless heart and trust yourself to me—me only?"

Her eyes never wavered, her hands never shook. They stiffened, as if to hold him at arm's length—a lovely pose of fear and grief, her head thrown back, as if half swooning.

"And your kindness, your marvellous goodness, was all for this!" she said at last. "What shall I say? Oh, miserable, unhappy Emma! Oh, cruel Greville! Leave me, I entreat you, or I shall go mad."

She hid her face in her arms and flung herself on her knees before her chair as if to bury herself from the sight of man, shuddering in every limb. He tried to lift her face towards his but could not. Instinct warned him that

he had better leave her to herself for a while, and after hovering over her vainly, almost inarticulate with anxiety, he went very softly out of the room. She lay a few minutes, then sprang up and dashed off a few words to Greville.

"I will come to England. I have had a conversation with Sir William this morning that has made me mad. He speaks—no, I do not know what to make of it! But Greville, my dear Greville, pray, for God's sake, wright to me and come to me for Sir William shall not be anything to me but your friend."

She sent that also. It would go with the other, and then, her head aching, her whole being in disorder, for she was a spendthrift of her emotions down the whole range from triumph to despair, she sent word to Sir William that she could not appear all day.

He had turned the matter carefully over in a swiftly dividing mind and, after long reflection, knowing women in general and Emma in particular, sent her a message to say that the world-famous German poet, Goethe—he who was as great a thinker as a poet; he, the impassioned lover, the final arbiter of taste in the artistic glories of Greece and Rome; and himself an Olympian in face and form—had promised to spend the evening at the Embassy that he might meet the fairest of modern antiques, the living statue, Sir William's *protégée*.

"And while I entreat you, my Emma, to rest if rest is vital to your looks and health, the disappointment will be irreparable if the only man in the world fit to sing your charms in immortal verse is so unhappy as not to see them. But do as you think best. What desire have I but that?"

She read the note thoughtfully, and sat up on the long settee in her bedroom where she had thrown herself down to mourn in a thin white wrapper. She rose and looked at her face in the long glass which had made so many charming and changing reflections of her various moods. Certainly it would be cruel to such a great man to allow him to come all the way from the North to Italy in search of beauty, and then to disappoint him of seeing the loveliest thing in Naples. Her Attitudes recurred to her mind. It would be interesting to note the effect on such a man. He would leave some record of it; he would write—yes, after all, her headache was not so very bad. And her sorrow did not live on warming and cherishing. It was a part of herself that could never, never change no matter how splendid or flattering her surroundings. And Greville—he should hear what one of the greatest men in the world thought of her. Why should she shut herself up and freeze the warm sunny world to which her smiles meant so much? There would not be thunder, the sun was coming out, and was shining a little in her heart also.

She wrote a line to Sir William.

"My head is verey, verey bad, but I am sensible I was hasty. I will come down this evening. I will obey your wish, my kind friend. Will you prepare the large chest rimmed with gold, in case you would wish me to perform for this gentleman? And if you will have your viola ready to accompany me I will sing if my head permits."

Sir William smiled, a smile of mingled amusement and triumph. He took a leisure half hour to write to Greville and detail what he thought proper of the scene, adding that the time had come and Greville would now do well to write and give Emma his final orders as to their separation and her attitude towards himself. The triumph, the

excitement, the soft languor of the Neapolitan summer, were all aiding his steadfast purpose.

As he wrote, Emma, in her luxurious room, was driving Teresa almost wild with her requisitions and restlessness. The thunder had cleared away but Vesuvius was terribly in eruption that night; wild forked flames burning to the zenith. Teresa could not think of the white robe or the flower for the hair. She dropped on her knees by the window to invoke her saints—"O San Antonio mio! O San Filippo!"—and Emma, half frantic with excitement, fell on her knees beside her, laughing, mocking: "O Santa Loola mia; O Santa Loola! Get up, Teresa! The gentlemen will be here. What does it matter? Don't be a fool!" And Teresa, wide-eyed with horror, "Does the Eccellenza doubt the holy saints?"

"No, but you will do quite as well if you pray to my Santa Loola! She's as good as any of them! Try!"

It was as if she were drunk; drunk with excitement that strange night. Teresa half shrank away, and Emma pulled her to her knees again, and then sprang up.

"My hair. It's getting late. Do it in a great knot at the back like the marble goddess in the museum. Come, be quick! The mountain can't hurt you here! I was only joking, Teresina mia. It's all nonsense. Come quick, we must hurry!"

She dressed with burning eyes and cheeks, listening to the voice in her heart which assured her that Sir William was hers, wholly hers, let Greville do what he would. Ah, she had a weapon now! She could threaten him with undreamed of possibilities. She stood before the glass again, and poor Teresa said, timidly:

"The Eccellenza is beautiful as a divine creature. Does not God favour you more than us?"

"No, why should He?" says Emma, trying the set of an auburn curl a little more veiling the white brow.

"O God! the Eccellenza is very ungrateful! He has been so good as to make your face the same as the Blessed Virgin's and you don't esteem it a favour?"

"Why, did you ever see the Virgin?" Emma was mocking again.

"Oh, yes. You are like every picture there is of her, and you know the people at Ischia fell down on their knees to you and begged you to grant them favours in her name. Oh, how beautiful you are!"

Emma told this little scene, laughing, to Sir William when she went down. The volcano, the girl's admiration, Sir William's eyes full of meanings that his tongue dared not as yet express; all, all, intoxicated her. She looked and moved a goddess that night, a supremely beautiful woman.

What the Immortal thought he has left on record, and who will may read it in his "Italienische Reise." Even Emma's excitement was stilled with a kind of awe when he entered the great room of the Palazzo Sessa where Sir William stood to greet him with a deference far more real and deep than he accorded to the King of the Two Sicilies. The poet appeared in a black satin coat and knee-breeches slightly embroidered with steel—a grave and dignified dress suited to his austere beauty—and attended like a monarch by his court, the two well-known artists Tischbein and Andreas. He took his stand by one of the long windows with the Vesuvius glow lighting up the sky behind him, and Emma was immediately presented, followed by the other guests, to all of whom he bowed in silence and in stiff German fashion from the waist. Instinctively the occasion was felt to be a great one, and all were a little awed at first. Emma drew back to watch the great man on whose verdict she felt much depended for her ambitions, for well she knew Sir William's opinion of his judgment in matters of art and beauty.

That he himself was beautiful none could doubt. That alone would have distinguished him in any company. She said afterwards to Sir William that he fulfilled completely her ideal of a king, which had perhaps suffered somewhat at the hands of Ferdinand of the Two Sicilies. Sift or separate his features she could not; they impressed and influenced her as the serene mellowing glow of a calm sunset sky irradiates all beneath it. Yet he should be described, for never in all her strange life before or after was she within the sphere of such serene intellectual magnificence, and, ignorant girl as she was, it impressed her like great organ music or the silent majesty of still gods met in the silence of the Palazzo Filangieri; or, even more, like the calm of the moonlighted sea from the Marina, where all the stars reflect themselves and are lost in unsounded deeps.

His face was nobly shaped, nobly carried on the column of a fine throat, his mouth firm, yet cut with sensuous beauty of curved lips and chin. His eyes were dominating; keen, calm, and clear. They turned meditatively on Emma herself until she shrank a little from a look which pierced deeper than she could afford to endure, and then he saw her perturbation and, smiling with distant kindness, turned to Sir William again and said something in French which she could not decipher. It reassured her, but she whispered apart to the Ambassador that she could never, never perform before so great a man.

"What are kings and princes to him," she said impulsively, "when he looks as if everything that ever was or will be is just nothing to him. He's like the statues in the museum and if they talked he would listen, but what does he care what little people like us say? I should feel like a doll."

And she was right; that mouth was made for the large utterance of the early gods, those ears to catch it.

Yet, after dinner, she was persuaded, commanded. The other guests crowded about her. Sir William himself put in his word. And still she refused. Then, coming forward slowly, the Olympian bowed before her, Sir William acting as interpreter.

"Gracious lady, you have given me so much already that it emboldens me to ask for more, since generosity is its own tax. You have afforded me the sight of such beauty as I believed dead with the glories of Greece and Rome. Now I entreat you to revive the poses of their glyptic art that I may carry away from Italy the most beautiful memory of all."

She could not have refused if she would. The only question in her mind was whether she should soar to undreamed of triumphs or fail ignominiously and for ever. For if the latter, never, never again would she perform.

Let Goethe himself tell the sight which met his eyes.

"The Chevalier Hamilton so long resident here as English Ambassador, so long, too, connoisseur and student of Art and Nature, has found their counterpart and acme with exquisite delight in a lovely girl—English and some twenty years of age. She is exceedingly beautiful and finely made. She wears a Greek garb becoming her to perfection. She then merely loosens her hair, takes a pair of shawls, and effects changes of posture, moods, gestures, mien and appearance that really make one feel as if one were in some dream. Here is visible, complete and bodied forth in movements of surprising variety, all that so many artists have sought in vain to fix and render. Successively standing, kneeling, seated, reclining, grave, sad, sportive, teasing, abandoned, penitent, alluring, threatening, agonized, one follows the other and grows out of it. She knows how to choose and shift the simple folds of her single kerchief for every expression and to adjust it into a hundred kinds of headgear. Her elderly

knight holds the torches for her and is absorbed in his soul's desire. In her he finds the charm of all antiques, the fair profiles on Sicilian coins, the Apollo Belvedere himself. Early to-morrow Tischbein paints her."

Indeed, he was enraptured. He pleaded to see the lovely show again and received her promise, for Emma knew that she had never so exceeded herself, that she had caught fire at the sun and rained his glories as well as her own on the startled audience. That was her art—her true art, the deep, intense receptivity which Greville had aimed to express and could not. Goethe saw deeper. Even that enchantment could not blind his intensity of percipience. Wonderful, yes, he thought—but yet, was she more than a fair picture, a lovely reflection, a living image? What of soul was there behind it to live on when the sweet face was dust? Too much to ask of a woman perhaps, but this one gave so much that always one wanted, hoped for more. "Geistlos?" Was she? Even he could not tell, and where Goethe was baffled the world must wonder in vain. Soulless? Ah, who shall say?

The last time he saw her she stood in her Pompeian coffin—a long chest, placed upright, and framed with bright gold. She was within it, a lovely Death in bright robes undimmed by the dust of centuries, or so it seemed. A strange fancy. Sir William had protested. Something in the exhibition chilled him. Would she look like that when her eyes were closed for ever and she as much a part of the past as the dead Pompeians themselves? But she would have it, and so in the twilight she stood there, still as death with dreaming lashes on quiet cheek, a faint exquisite smile on locked lips, and hands hanging empty beside her.

There was dead silence at first when she dissolved again into motion. The impression was too strong. A

shadow filled the room and made its own silence. Then she sprang from the tomb; roseate, smiling, expectant.

"It was not good, I could do it better another time, but I was so frightened."

That was the wrong note. It jarred on Goethe's stretched nerves. It was perhaps the reason why he felt her to be "geistlos." She should have disappeared quietly and have been seen no more that night. But though it repelled him as an artist, as a man it warmed him, and turning to Hamilton he echoed his own word.

"Perfection! She is a masterpiece of the Arch Artist" —and so it stands recorded until art itself shall be forgotten.

That evening made Emma's beauty and her Attitudes a matter of European fame. Those words were repeated until they spread through the capitals of the world. Even the English in Naples were forced to pride in their amazing countrywoman, though they would have none of her individually.

Such artists as Lady Diana Beauclerck and Mrs. Damer came to Naples simply to study her. The great Italian ladies began to make overtures. "Morals, yes; but such an unusual case! Such talents! If Goethe had so expressed himself, what person of any consequence could be left out of such a refined, an artistic society!"

So the loud world goes on its way and licks the feet of its masters.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PROCESS

But while those letters were speeding to Greville, Sir William, not unobservant that absence appeared to make the heart grow fonder, resolved to try the same prescription on his own account.

A visit to Rome was desirable and necessary in diplomatic interests, and a little diplomatic reflection might not be amiss for Emma. He had come to be so necessary a part of her daily life that it would be as well she should realize how much she owed to his presence—an experiment he would not have ventured earlier but felt might be well essayed now. He had proved on that celebrated evening that chaste indignation might be surmounted by the wish to shine, and it emboldened him.

They met a day or two later in the beautiful boudoir he had lately fitted for her with great mirrors entirely covering the wall opposite the Chinese-fashion semi-circular window to reflect and repeat the glorious sea and sky beyond. It might indeed have been a palace beneath the sea for light and shimmer, and she delighted to watch the lovely progress of the day from dawn to sunsetting and twilight and moonlight. She had caught the moon and every star in her own chamber, she would say, laughing.

"See; here is Venus!" pointing to her mirrors, "and I can swim along that moon-path to heaven."

It was a room sacred to their meetings. The written sheets of the first part of his book on Etruscan urns lay on the table and Emma—Emma!—was reading them with him and learning every day to be more and more his companion.

Now he came in quietly, with a certain gravity, very different from his usual delight in that morning entry.

"I have a piece of news for you, Emma. I am going away for some weeks."

The pencil slipped from her fingers. She looked up startled.

"Away!"

"Yes. It is necessary, but even if it had not been necessary I should have gone. I think you understand the reason very well."

"You are angry with me?" The quick breath caught on the words.

"No. It is rather you who are angry with me."

It faced her with a dilemma. She looked down, and her cheeks crimsoned.

"I read your silence very well," he went on calmly. "Your heart is not ungrateful but your modesty was alarmed. You consider yourself Greville's wife in all but name. Am I wrong?"

She moved her head slightly, but said nothing.

"Well, that matter is for you and Greville to settle, and since we both have written, for I wrote and conclude you have done the same, we shall soon know his mind. Meanwhile I wish to assure you that you have no occasion for alarm. I shall not offend in that respect again. You are perfectly safe."

Terror seized her. What was there in Greville to count on? What would be her fate if Sir William were offended beyond hope? How could she convey to him that her prayer had really been, "O Lord, protect me, but do not protect me too much!" How could she make him understand her doubts and fears? Impossible! Therefore she took refuge in a quiet grief which must touch and plead for her.

"You are angry with me," she repeated sorrowfully,

"and what can I say? Oh, if you could but see the warm true affection in my heart you would not be so cruel to your unhappy Emma. Once you said I was your friend—"

"You are my dear friend. I shall never call you otherwise."

She turned with eyes swimming in sudden tears.

"Do you call me your dear friend? Ah, what a happy creature is your Emma—me that had no friend, no protector, nobody that I could trust, and now to be the friend, the Emma of Sir William Hamilton!"

He was literally obliged to look away from her. How otherwise could he persist in his purpose of leaving her to the cruel reflection that she had wounded him. And yet it was necessary that he should go. He knew it. Still, he trifled with temptation.

"And yet, though you feel this, you were shocked at the thought of being wholly mine, Emma; bound to me by the tenderest ties?"

She looked down and muttered the one word, "Greville."

"Yes, you are right. That brings us back to where we started. We have written to Greville. I shall go away and leave you to reflection which will deeply affect us both. There is no more to be said at present."

"Oh, don't go!" It came like an involuntary cry. "Won't you miss me? Won't you miss accompanying my songs with your viola; and how can I sing if you are gone? And the book"—she laid her hand on the sheets—"and the garden? If you go I will go nowhere until you come back. It's all nothing to me unless you're here."

He wanted to improve on that admission but held himself strongly back.

"My dear Emma, I have called you my friend. I wish this matter settled with reason and good sense, and to

that end we must separate a while that we may both reflect. I have my thinking to do as well as you yours. This pleasant delightful life has drifted us into a situation which may hold its difficulties for me as well as for you if I am not careful. It will really be best we should meet no more until you have heard from Greville. Let us postpone any discussion until then."

It terrified her, but what could she say? Her mind was a tossing sea. She wished to keep them both—the one as a lover, the other as an indulgent friend—and it looked most alarmingly as if neither could be trained into the position she wished him to fill.

"May I write to you?" she faltered.

"Certainly. And pray write fully to Greville. Your mind and his will be the easier for it. The position cannot be made too clear. Now, we will not meet except in public until I return."

He got himself out of the room somehow, out of range of those imploring eyes. And yet what they implored she knew no more than he. And though he took her to Sorrento where she was the hostess at an informal entertainment, the centre of all thoughts and admiration, she could not catch a single responsive look from his eyes. His private band was there and accompanied her in her latest, most brilliant song. The applause was deafening, but he was talking to my Lady Diana Beauclerck before it ceased and she could not see a single motion of his hands to swell the uproar. She sang again some of the Piedigrotta songs—redolent of the country and the people—this time in costume and with her tambourine, and yet could extract nothing but the placid smile of general benevolence with which he regarded all the company. Her fears grew steadily, and by the time he departed before she was up, she was on tenter-hooks.

She went and shut herself that evening into the room

of the mirrors and did the serious thinking he recommended, with a little note of farewell from him in her hand. He was hurt and she had hurt him. How far had she hurt herself in doing it? Could it be possible that she had been foolishly, madly mistaken in her course throughout; that if she had written to Greville rather on her triumphs than her sorrows, he might have valued her more highly? Men did not like perpetual moaning and whining, and Greville of all men would not bear it. Could that be the reason why he had not troubled to answer her letters? If so—oh, if she could but recall the last two she had written! And as to Sir William—had she not deafened and besieged him with her Greville lamentations and was not that madness also? What could have possessed her to weary them both with such folly? Surely the merest beginner should have known better; and she—the beauty, the genius whom all her world applauded, who could not only delight but fascinate every man who looked into her eyes—*she* to behave like a love-sick country girl!

She would write to Sir William—yes, but letters that should neither lament nor weary him. She would write to Greville—yes, but it should be a song of triumph. Not a minute would she lose! Sir William first. He should find the letter waiting his arrival. What could she tell him he did not know? The convent—that would amuse him. She would prattle on paper as she talked when she drew up her stool beside his chair and told him the day's adventures. And first, she began with his health and happiness and comfort, leaning on them, but not too strongly—no sentiment—and then passed on.

"I had hardly time to thank you for your kind letter of this morning as I was busy preparing for to go on my visit to the convent of Santa Romita and endead I am glad I went but tomorrow I dine with them in full as-

sembly. I am quite charmed with Beatrice Acquaviva. Such is the name of the charming whoman I saw today. O Sir William, she is a pretty whoman! She is 29 years old. She took the veil at 20 and does not repent to this day, though if I am a judge of physiognomy her eyes does not look like the eyes of a nun. They are always laughing and something in them vastly alluring, and I wonder the men of Naples woud suffer the onely pretty whoman who is realy pretty to be shut in a convent. But it is like the mean-spirited ill taste of the Neapolitans. I told her I wondered how she woud be lett to hide herself from the world, and I daresay thousands of tears was shed the day she deprived Naples of one of its greatest ornaments. She answered with a sigh, that endead numbers of tears was shed and once or twice her resolution was allmost shook. And since that time one of her sisters had followed her example. But I think Beatrice is charming and I realy feil for her an affection. Her eyes, Sir William, is I don't know how to describe them. I stopt one hour with them and I had all the good things to eat and I promise you they don't starve themselves, but their dress is very becoming, and she told me she was allowed to wear rings and mufs and any little thing she liked and endead she displayed today a great deal of finery, for she had four or five dimond rings on her fingers and seemed fond of her muff. She has excellent teeth and shows them for she is always laughing. She kissed my lips, cheeks and forehead and every moment exclaimed 'Charming fine creature,' admired my dress, said I looked like an angel, for I was in clear white dimity and a blue sash. 'Now,' she says, 'it would be worth while to live for such a one as you. Your good heart would melt at any trouble that befel me and partake of one's greef or be equaly happy at one's good fortune.' In short I sat and listened to her and the tears stood in my eyes and I loved her at

that moment. Did she not speak very pretty? But not one word of religion. There is sixty whomen and all well-looking but not like the fair Beatrice. 'O Emma,' she says to me, 'they brought here the Viene minister's wife but I did not like the looks of her at first. She was little, short, pinched face and I received her cooly. How different from you. We may read your heart in your countenance, your complexion, in short your figure and your features is rare, for you are like the marble statues I saw when I was in the world.' I think she flattered me up but I was pleased."

So was Sir William. He laughed to his heart's content over this effusion—Emma among the nuns! Certainly she would be a disintegrating influence. He wrote back, encouraging her to go there as often as she could, to go everywhere and send him these naïve descriptions—a calm, friendly letter. Indeed, it ended, "Kindest regards to my dear friend Emma, from," etc. She wrote back that in his absence convent society was the gayest she could endure—nothing where he could have been and was not was pleasant without him. And then, "Do you call me your dear friend? Oh, if I could express myself! If I had words to thank you that I may not be choaked with meanings for which I can find no utterance."

She found utterance, however, for many gay little descriptions, many memories of the quiet happy evenings they had had, winged with music and pleasant talk—evenings when her education was being carried on delightfully, insensibly, by one of the most cultivated minds in Europe. That, she knew, was his favourite pursuit now; the pleasure he would choose in preference to any other. She remembered what he had told her with such pride as the saying of his intimate friend, the great and scientific

Sir Joseph Banks: "I rejoice to hear she proceeds with success in her improvement. Her beauty will, I hope, last as long as she can wish; but her mind, once stored with instruction, will certainly last as long as she stays this side of heaven." Could it be wondered that her head was a little giddy with such notices from such men? After all, as she herself said: "I am a pretty woman and one cannot be everything at once."

Perhaps in any case the forcing process had been a little too rapid for slow-footed common sense to keep up with it. The environment, too, carried its own dangers. Not for nothing did Goethe note before quitting those enchanted shores that "Naples is a paradise. Every one lives, after his kind, intoxicated with self-forgetfulness. It is the same with me. I scarcely recognize myself. Yesterday I thought 'Either you were or *are* mad.'"

Emma, after a very different fashion, was in the same case. The general adoration had, as Greville foresaw, gone to her brain; indeed, it was a heady draught. She had tasted pleasures she could never now forego. Greville —of course she loved him—but whereas the alternative had been Greville or despair, it was now becoming clear to her that the chance which gave her not only Greville but Hamilton was unique. It could never recur. If she lost them both her life would run the ordinary course of such lives as hers; another, other protectors; waning beauty; desertion. She might, of course, make a marriage, even a wealthy one, but there again Greville and Hamilton—her twin stars—had spoiled her for the company of the average man of pleasure, the only type which would consider her either as a mistress or wife. It is the truth of this strangely mixed Emma that she loved to learn many things worth learning, and with very little delicacy of her own she loved to be with those who natu-

rally owned it and to reflect it until she could half deceive herself as well as them into the belief that she shared it.

Every day in Sir William's absence she would order the boat at her disposal and float about the *cuvette bleue* of the bay, thinking, dreaming in a sort of languor that threatened to overwhelm her now. It was a respite, a lull before she was compelled to make that alarming definite choice which must sever her from Greville and the past for ever, for the alternative now was not Greville or despair; it was Greville or Sir William.

A slow seductive enervation was in the very air. She wandered in the famous gardens with only a staid old woman as attendant, who followed decorously a little behind, and scarcely saw how many eyes sought the lovely Englishwoman; and there one day the King himself met her, and, overjoyed at the chance of her *cavaliere servente's* absence, ventured to join her among the flowers. A warm languid day, the sun drowsing among the blossoms and the swaying palms, what could be a more charming occupation than to see how her Italian had improved since their last meeting? Emma was all discretion, the monarch all ardour, and old women—in Italy only, let us believe—not inaccessible to Royal bribes which ensure their absence at needed moments.

The pair sat among the rosy oleanders, with the melting sapphire of the sea in glimpses through divinest blossomed boughs where all the ancient gods of Italy might have dreamed away the long warm hours. And Ferdinand urged his love for the exquisite foreigner, and she parried and fenced, and dared neither wholly discourage the Royal advances nor wholly smile upon them, and so sat for an hour, basking in the miraculous truth that she, the once forlorn and forsaken, had it in her power to captivate a king. He followed her when she arose, beseeching, en-

treating, she looking over her shoulder with the look we know so well in the "Bacchante," where for Romney's inspiration she had assumed the arch repelling-inviting smile that was to catch the King in its golden net. But when she left the gardens she knew he did not interest her. It would be useful for writing to Greville. It would convince Hamilton of her pure fidelity when he returned. That was all the use of it. She dismissed the Royal wooer with the final wave of her hand, and fell into heavy thought again.

But she wrote of it to Greville; no tearful plaintive letter this time, but rather a sinister triumph meant to warn him that longer delay and hovering about a cold English bride would mean a loss that possibly nothing could ever replace. Kings would not dispute Miss Middleton with him. Royal dukes, like His Highness of Gloucester, would not creep to *her* feet for an introduction. He would have a commonplace dowdy wife, no more; and even as regards fortune: If one can sing like an angel, dance, pose, draw not only men's but women's frantic admiration, be a European celebrity, may not money also fall in golden showers? She believed it might. Consequently, we boast! We tell Greville sufficient to let him imagine even greater splendours than as yet have transpired!

At Sorrento they were all "in ecstasies of adoration" when she entertained there. "I left some dying, some crying and all in despair. Mind you, this was all nobility and as proud as the devil. *We* humbled them! But what astonished them was that I should speak such good Italian. For I paid them, I spared none of them, though I was civil and obliging. One asked me if I left a love at Naples that I left them so soon. I pulled my lip at him, to say 'I pray, do you take me for an Italian? Look, sir, I am English. I have one *cavaliere servente* and I have brought

him with me.' The house is full of painters painting me. He [Sir William] has now got nine pictures of me and two a-painting. Marchant is cutting my head in stone, that is in camea for a ring. There is another man modeling me in wax, and another in clay. All the artists is come from Rome to study from me. Galucci played some of my solfegos and you woud have thought he woud have gone mad. He never saw or heard of such a whoman before. He says when he first came in I frightened him with a Majesty and Juno look that I received him with. Then he says that whent off on being more acquainted and I enchanted him by my politeness and the manner in which I did the honors, and then I almost made him cry with Handels, and with the comick he could not contain himself for he says he never saw the tragick and comick muse blended so happily together."

Yes, Greville shall know, even if she gives the impression that wide Italy is emptied of artists who have poured into Naples with no other occupation than to stare at her! It is the last attempt to bring him to her feet. He shall know that, before Sir William went, she—she, the rejected—was the guest of honour on board a foreign man-of-war. No less!

"We sett down thirty to dine, me at the head of the tables, mistress of the feast, drest all in virgin white and my hair all in ringlets reaching allmost to my heals. I assure you it is so long that I realy lookd and moved amongst it. Sir William said so."

If that does not move him, nothing will and if he thinks those silken auburn locks have grown miraculously from knee to heel during that year in Italy, then let him! Perhaps he has forgotten that little fact with so much else.

That letter despatched, she turns again to write to Hamilton. When will he come back?

"One hour's absence is a year. My friend, my All, my earthly good, my Kind home in one, you are to me eating, drinking and cloathing, my comforter in distress. Then why shall I not love you? Endead I must and ought whilst life is left in me or reason to think on you."

Certainly Emma can write with energy and spirit when she will; all the warmth of a graphic pen, of a warm heart, is hers when she chooses to express it. Sir William, reading the last, surprises himself by laying it against his cheek, and murmuring, "Dear child; my beloved Emma!" hoping and believing that this absence is teaching her some of the secrets of her own shy heart.

And Greville? Greville receiving his, studies it with care, makes a pencil note or two of the contents in his useful pocketbook, and—re-encloses it to Sir William with an admonitory message. "Go on circumventing Emma. She will surrender at last. It is not in the power of woman to stand so prolonged a siege."

And now, the time come, he prepares himself to write to Emma, with the goal in sight. The message must be brief and vague, but must show her clearly once and for all that it is finished between them. Miss Middleton is half wooed, half won, he hopes. There can be no delay. He writes back tersely, that she is "to oblige Sir William."

She read this paper in the solitude of that lovely room which had brought the sea, the blue air, indoors, to keep her company with the sunshine, and in a frantic passion, half fury, half raging love, she spat upon it, stamped her foot upon it, spurned it, a girl of the people, all the veneer gone and rage blazing uncontrolled. She could not write for a while, her hands shook so violently, every fibre of her body quivering under the shameful blow. She swallowed a glass of water, her teeth chattering against the rim. She lay long, half torpid, to compose herself and could

not—a strong and righteous anger at the mean trick she had never suspected drove her like a ship before a gale. But she would, she must write if she died for it, and then at long last, as it seemed, she wrote.

"Nothing can express my rage. Greville, to advise me! You that used to envy my smiles. How with cool indifference to advise me! Oh, that is the worst of all. But I will not, no, I will not rage. If I was with you I would murder you and myself boath. I will go to London, go into every excess of vice till I dye, a miserable broken-hearted wretch, and leave my fate as a warning to young whomen never to be too good, for now you have made me good you have abandoned me, and some violent end shall finish our connexion if it is to finish."

A long pause, and tenderer thoughts stole over her. Her hand delayed. Must the last words be all cruel poisoned darts? Ah, no. She wrote again slower, the tears this time falling in large drops like blood upon the letter.

"It is enough. I have paper that Greville wrote on. He has folded it up. He wet the wafer. How I envy thee the place of Emma's lips that woud give worlds, had she them, to kiss those lips. I onely wish a wafer was my onely rival. But I submit to what God and Greville pleases."

God and Greville! She laid down the pen.

It is not too much to say that with that letter died the last remnant of virginity in Emma's heart. It had survived much, but that mean treachery slaughtered it. It is another and a worse, though never a wholly bad woman, who survives—a woman dangerously scorned who will

dangerously repay it to Greville and others. She wrote once more before Sir William returned.

"Pray write, for nothing will make me so angry, and it is not to your *interest* to disoblige me, for you don't know the power I have here. If you affront me I will make him marry me. God bless you forever."

A different woman, as may well be seen, but Greville did not realize it. It must be owned he played his cards from this time clumsily both with the girl and Sir William. He sent that wild threat to his uncle because it would set him on his guard. He wrote with a cool superior friendship to Emma, and quick as lightning she caught his tone, seeing all lost, and replied in kind. Every nerve, every sense, was on guard now. She would not injure herself by trying to make trouble between Sir William and his favourite friend. No, though her girdle should burst, to use her own graphic phrase, she would keep her temper, play her game and win—and win. And Greville should see it and suffer! He had more cause for annoyance than she knew. Miss Middleton refused him, an expected post slipped through his fingers, and it was all in all to him to be well with Sir William.

She helped him in her own way and for her own ends. Not a word of complaint—a summer calm, kindly references to Greville, awaited the uneasy Sir William when he returned to the Palazzo Sessa. And when they were alone she pulled her little stool beside him, and looking up with a smile half sad, half arch, said softly:

"I have my wisdom teeth at last, Sir William. You have seen the last of the silly impatient Emma. She spread her wings and flew away far beyond Capri while you were gone. It is a happy grateful girl now who will love you forever and ever, who did not even know until your dear beloved face was out of sight how little she could do without you."

He stooped forward and looked into her face, scarcely believing:

"Emma, dearest and sweetest, do you mean it?"

"And more," she said, "much more! My eyes are opened."

He put his arms about her, dazzled, overcome, now that the moment of surrender was upon him. Her glowing beauty bathed him, the loveliest lips on earth were pressed to his, the curtain of silken hair fell about them.

Let a man beware of the hour which fulfils all his wishes.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WAY TO TRIUMPH

Emma, laughing, singing, not a care in her sea-blue eyes four years later. Emma, the sunlight of the Palazzo Sessa, sweet as a summer dawn to Hamilton and to all the world. Greville, forgotten as a lover, preserved as a friend—after a fashion! We write to him, we enter sympathetically into his concerns. He is still unmarried. We do not tell him we rejoice in Miss Middleton's refusal, for that would be unkind, injudicious. We say she is a foolish girl who will have cause to regret her folly. Naturally we dwell on the domestic peace and happiness of the Palazzo Sessa, and the charm of days that drift like flower petals on a breeze. We threaten no more—that was but a wild outburst of passion at a very irritating moment, and much better forgotten. Greville has no cause for uneasiness. Emma is pleasantly provided for. Sir William is furnished with a mistress so charming that no anxiety about marriage can possibly arise, and he may rise up and call himself blessed, for his plan has been a success from beginning to end. He certainly had not the smallest fear that his uncle would make himself ridiculous, and what could be more ridiculous than to marry a woman whom all Europe knew as his *belle amie*. Besides he himself had already given the elderly lover his views as to the proper provision to be made for Emma when this last bond should wear thin. That suggestion would probably bring forth an enlightening answer. It brought forth a very comfortable one; the more so because so evidently sincere.

"I fear," Sir William wrote, "that her views are beyond what I can bring myself to execute, and that when her hopes on this point are over she will make herself and me unhappy."

So all was well to the last point. Sir William duly on his guard and Emma's impetuosity, as usual, hurrying her into mistakes. Greville laid that letter beside a friendly one from Emma, with a contented sigh and pursued his irreproachable way in peace.

So also did Emma, though not by any means in inward quiet. The more dazzling, the more delightful her triumphs, the more she felt the insecurity of the foundation. Sir William was her slave, but not her legalized slave, and though she had no fears for the present it must be her certain doom to be dismissed with a slender "provision" when he grew older and his family reclaimed him as it does all old and wealthy men. Day by day she made herself dearer and more necessary to him but never a day seemed to bring that goal nearer. She would hint, sigh, glance gently near the target, but never an arrow found the bull's eye. He would do anything, everything for her—excepting the one thing that mattered more than all the wealth of the world, and yet she could not teach herself to think it impossible. Sometimes, the inward storm broke in nervous irritations in which he must have guessed the truth, and then she would be terrified and redouble her wifely submissions. Suppose he should think, as Greville had thought, that she had an ungoverned temper; then all hope would be over. He certainly was keenly on the watch—and why, why, if he thought the thing impossible?

Her circumspection was almost perfect. She solved the nearly impossible problem of being passionately admired, the dancing star of gaiety, the sighed for of all the distinguished and attractive men who came and went

in their society, and yet of preserving a reputation of unsullied fidelity to her Ambassador. No other man had so much as a look to boast of. They called her the lovely ice-image. Sir William knew better and was radiant. But never a word of the only reward she craved, and she could see only a future in which Greville and the family would consult coldly on an adequate pension in return for her services.

And yet, the Queen had seen her immaculate propriety of behaviour with admiration, and had even pointed her out as an example to the giddy ladies who formed the Royal circle. "If a young woman in *her* position can so conduct herself, what ought," etc. The rest of the little sermon may be imagined, and might have been more effective but for the Royal preacher's own intimacy with the cool, handsome Irishman Acton who was the Neapolitan Minister of Marine, whom the wits of Naples coupled with King and Queen in the assertion that the three were *hic*, *haec*, *hoc*, and the King the last of them. But what did Emma care? Royalty is royalty, amuse itself how it will, and every word that fell from Marie Caroline's lips was treasured and laid before Hamilton. She had chilled the King off effectually and the lovers laughed together over that thwarted gallantry. He was lost in admiration of the tender affection which nothing could swerve. Emma, who desired the Queen's attentions very much more eagerly than the King's, knew well of Her Majesty's highly unreasonable jealousy of her consort's diversions, and trimmed her sails accordingly. Not that they were any temptation to her. She was firmly if temperately attached to Hamilton, was less physically than intellectually sensuous, and had, moreover, a clear end before her and a tangled way to it which absorbed all her deeper interests. And as yet no prospect of success. He was wary beyond all her skill. A plotter, an adventuress she may

be called by the too righteous, but would not any woman have done the same? And her heart was sincere if her brain was tortuous. She cared for her man; was grateful for benefits received although she hoped for more.

Sir William came in one day a little disquieted.

"News, my dearest child, news from England. A relation of mine, a very important relation coming out. I would have had her here in the house but—no, no, my Emma, my dear, don't look sad. Don't hide your face. What is she or any one compared to my beauty? You never thought I meant that. Come here!"

He drew her to his knee and she drooped her head on his shoulder.

"But, Sir William, the foreign ladies here don't mind me. Indeed they don't! See how they come to our evenings! And when we entertain at the Villa Emma, or anywhere, they don't hold away. They have no objections."

"My angel, yes." He smoothed her hair tenderly. Never once did he fail in the gentlest kindness and even respect. "But English women, particularly English women about Queen Charlotte, have to be careful. Absurd, ridiculous, when every one knows what goes on, and when some of the women they pass by are a million times better and more beautiful than themselves! But this is a very great lady and was in attendance on the Queen for a considerable time. It is the Duchess of Argyll, my cousin by marriage. Her first husband was Duke of Hamilton. You can imagine I would give anything that she should know my jewel and see it sparkle, but 'tis impossible. She will hear your praises all over Naples—that's my consolation—your kind heart not the least. But I wanted to prepare you for this, for I would not have it hurt you when she comes."

"It won't, it shan't hurt me!" she said, smiling courage-

ously into his eyes. "No one can have everything and I'd like to know where is the woman that has so much as me! Duchess as she is I daresay she hasn't the quarter! No, my own Sir William, you shall go see her and then come back to our home, and I believe you'll own there's no place so happy for us both. What do I want with duchesses? Is she very proud?"

"As proud as a gorgeous peacock. Didn't Bozzy, old Dr. Johnson's Boswell, say she chilled him nearly into marble with her majesty? But, for all that, he ended by allowing there was something pleasant too—'better be strangled by a silk rope than a hempen,'—I forget the exact words. But she's all the prouder because she began life so poor that she and her beautiful sister, Maria, had to borrow dresses from a saucy actress before they could make any appearance in the world. Well born, all the same, granddaughters of Lord Mayo's. Gunning was their name."

"Oh, tell me more!" cried Emma, sparkling with interest. "I've heard Greville speak of the beautiful Gunnings. Were they as beautiful—as me?"

She pouted those incomparable lips into a kiss that ensured his denial.

"Of course not. Whoever was or will be? But Maria —she married Lord Coventry—came as near you as mortal woman could, for all she was a lovely doll with not a gleam of your good sense and talents. Elizabeth, the double Duchess, had more brains, and a great deal more dignity, and an amazing beauty. Her smile—"

"I want to see her. I want to see her!" Emma clapped her hands and sent the rays flashing from two rings of great diamonds. She might have been a graven image hung with jewels if she would, but refused extravagance of that order and commanded Sir William to save every stray penny for his Etruscan urns. What wonder she

wore his heart instead of his fripperies? As a matter of fact, these rings were his dead wife's. Even his good taste was not flawless.

"You *shall* see her, I promise, and she shall see you. But remember she is fifty now, and her health not strong. I like her. There's a kind of courage in her that matches your own. If things had been different you might have been friends."

Emma sighed, a soft little sigh, no more. But it said, and he heard it—"If things were different! Ah, and they might be. Have I not deserved it?" Much may be said in a sigh.

The Duchess came, her fame preceding her, with a little attendant court of her own, and all Naples thrilled to receive the greatest of the great English ladies. However she had begun in life she had since acquired a most majestic dignity, and the English women who had held coldly aloof from Emma were now certain of a leader who would open the way to victory and the public rout of the fair sinner.

Sir William waited upon her directly she arrived. He felt it was best to place the matter on a footing of perfect frankness at once, and was eager to find her alone; an impossibility, as it seemed, for all the gay world of Naples was perpetually in her salon.

At last he secured her, and by the merest chance, for they met in the same rose-hung gardens where Emma had repelled the King's advances, beneath a long trellised pergola with a delicate sea-breeze wandering like a bee drunken with perfume and colour among the roses. She sat, leaning back in the chair her footman had set beneath the delicious shadow, half smiling with delight at the beauty about her.

"What a place! What a scene!" she said softly. "My dear Sir William, though you have written to Charlotte

more than once, and even when you came to England last, you never expressed the half of it. 'Tis surprising to me that we endure the English climate who could be here. 'Tis to share the very youth of the world."

"Many things conspire to make it fascinating. When on a moonlit night on the Marina I hear the soft thrum of guitars, the singing voices and subdued laughter I often wonder whether I can bear the chill of the foggy North any more," he said. "It is home in a sense but—well, I left it a long time ago. My notions are Italian—lax, some would call them. And yet, call them what you will, they are the same all the world over, at bottom."

"For my part the English air wearies me," says her Grace, wielding a black fan, her large calm eyes studying him above its rim. "I was always happier in Scotland than at Court. Hamilton Palace was my heaven; and later, Inverary. I suppose 'twas the Irish blood in me, my father's blood, that couldn't content itself with beef and pudding and solid worth; that was better pleased with the haunted castles and purple heather of the North. Yes, even in the winter and the grey rain that falls and falls! I remember Oban in a smurr of sea fog"—she looked across the sapphire sea and sighed—"I wonder shall I ever see it more!"

"Why, madam, yes! Your Grace will reign queen of the Highland hearts for many a long day yet."

"No, no, my good Sir William, when beauty goes, hearts follow her like her own doves. I was a queen once. I am an elderly duchess now."

She turned her sweet face upon him smiling, sweet like a half-faded rose that hangs a little wearily on its stem, but perfumed and lovely still with a pathetic loveliness. Her voice was soft as the breeze. That had been always a part of the Gunning charm. To him who could remember when she and her dead sister had set London in a

ferment, twin stars rising with mutual rays, the very sight of her must always recall the time when he too was young and a worshipper at the little feet which earned their shoemaker half a fortune when he exhibited the beauties' shoes at so much a head to the crowd. Only Sir William had never been certain which of the two possessed his heart. Was it Elizabeth, was it Maria? How could any poor devil tell? Dear dead frivolities, how they warmed him! He laughed a little at the memory and they talked together over places and people well known to both; the perfect free masonry of caste. A pleasant hour.

"I saw Greville before I left London. He does not improve on me in spite of his cleverness and excellent fine manners. A selfish young man, as I think, and cold. I was not surprised Miss Middleton refused him. A warm-hearted girl."

"A better, more well-conducted, sensible man does not exist, your Grace!" Sir William was eager in the defence. "I know no one whose advice I would sooner take."

"Yes, on a Greek urn or a question of worldly wisdom or good taste," says her Grace with her soft, imperial air. "But not on a matter of the heart or of kindness or —what shall I say?—heart's honour. No, Sir William; indeed, believe me, women are the best judges of such matters, and *there* I pronounce Greville outside the pale."

"Madam, I protest!"

"No, you agree! you always agreed with me. You remember when Hamilton laughed at my Irish brogue you would say it was the music of the spheres."

"And it was and always will be!"

"No—I am always contradicting my kind cousin—I have forgotten my Irish days and Irish ways, I am only a dull old duchess now. But I love beauty though I don't see any to match—"

"Your own!" he interrupted.

"No, my poor sister's. Heavens, how lovely she was! Do you remember—but who's that?"

She pointed covertly with her fan at a girl pacing absently down the pergola with an elderly woman handsomely dressed leaning on her arm. She herself was dressed in white, with a large straw hat trimmed with blue ribbons shading her face, and carried a basket of roses in the other hand. A little black and white silken spaniel trotted after her.

She was looking gravely down on the path as she walked, lost in thought, and evidently knew nothing of who sat among the roses. The pair stopped a little way off and there she stood in perfect quiet, looking far away to the sea. A lovely tranquillity was on her face and the gently relaxed figure. It was as though some vaguely pleasant thought possessed her, all sunshine and roses.

"That girl," said the Duchess softly, lest she should be overheard, "is the greatest beauty I have seen since my sister died. I should say a perfect beauty if I did not remember Maria. I can think no one else equals *her*. What is your judgment?"

"You must not ask my judgment here!" he whispered, and as Emma and her mother moved towards them again in passing, he rose and bowed with the most punctilious courtesy, Emma flushing brightly as they curtseyed in answer and passed on. She could guess very well who the noble-looking woman must be who sat so much at ease with Sir William. She could not hurry her mother, however, and so they went slowly out of sight.

"Who is she?" the Duchess demanded.

He looked her straight in the face.

"As I remember you, madam, your Grace was bound by no conventions. You were not held by other people's approvals and disapprovals. You judged for yourself and imposed your own will on others. If so great a lady

cannot, who can? That was your attitude. Is it so still?"

"Certainly, so far as I know. Who is she? An unmentionable?"

"No, an extremely mentionable, mentioned indeed by all here who can admire beauty, genius, and the warmest heart in the world."

"There spoke a lover!" says the Duchess, fixing him with her clear eyes. "I know who she is now. She is the lady of the Embassy. Oh, I have heard all about her. Well, cousin, I like you for bowing to her while you sat with me. You *could* have made as though you did not see her. It was like you. I think all the Hamiltons are gentlemen."

"Madam, not even for your Grace's good opinion would I slight the woman I love best in the world. Yet I am thankful it approves mine."

"Tell me about her. I have heard so many scandals since I came that the truth would be of interest. Is she of the common sort—or what?"

Let Sir William's speech be imagined rather than related. He painted her for the Duchess as no other voice, not even Romney's nor yet his brush, could have painted her. Her heart, her purity, her intellect, her extraordinary accomplishments (indeed the Duchess had heard much of the latter), all were passed in review with a lover's fondness.

She listened without a frown. In that perfumed languid air it was perhaps more irksome to sit in judgment than in the grey chills of England, but in any case she considered her station too high to be bound by any other opinion than her own. Her Grace was accustomed to say that the working class and the aristocratic are a law unto themselves in matters of morals and that it is but the middle class who skulk and hypocritize. It may be observed that she coined her words as well as her views and

was more likely to be friendly with the farmer's wife than the lawyer's lady.

Therefore she brought an unprejudiced mind to bear on Sir William's story, which included neither Up Park nor Edgware Row nor the appurtenances thereof. The picture presented to her mind was that of a young and pure-minded woman submerged by cruel fate and gifted with beauty and genius worthy of the highest, the widest opportunity. Let the reader judge how far she was deceived.

When Sir William had finished, she, noting meanwhile with some compassion how the clear sunlight emphasized the lines of sixty years in his face, answered kindly enough.

"I see how your interest is engaged, and indeed the story is a very singular one. I see also that you would willingly engage my sympathy for the young person, and 'tis so easily engaged where courage and beauty are concerned that I must needs say I prefer to give my judgment a little play also. What is her position in the society of Naples?"

"Why, madam, the Queen is much interested and has said often to me that she would willingly make her acquaintance, but you are aware 'tis impossible she should be received at Court. The King used to call at the Palazzo Sessa to sing duos with her—ill enough for a King! —but, as you know his reputation with women, Emma in her discretion judged it best to stop that diversion of His Majesty's, which much gratified the Queen, and made her favour secure in that quarter. The Neapolitan ladies treat her with every courtesy, and God knows 'twere ridiculous otherwise, as not one is without her lover. As for the English ladies, some visiting here, of high birth, like my Lady Diana Beauclerck and the artist Mrs. Damer, have not disdained her, but they are more or less

ladies errant in the eyes of the English resident here, and I must own the residents defy the Embassy and all its works. They will not see that such genius as Emma's makes its own laws—"

"But they can be scarcely expected to see it should make theirs!" interrupted the Duchess with a hidden smile in her eyes. It was somewhat absurd to hear a man who knew the world present his case in this way.

"True, madam. Well, I will trouble your Grace no more. Mrs. Hart has a large society—if it could content her—and the admiration of every man of judgment who ever beheld her."

"She appears then like the man in the fairy tale who having got the moon wanted the sun also."

"Are not your sex ever so, madam?"

"May be, may be not. Well, my good Sir William, I desire to see your paragon at closer quarters. Would she consent, do you think, to come quietly to my salon one evening and sing for an old lady who finds San Carlo somewhat fatiguing? May I see those poses of which all the world talks? Whatever the lady be she won't hurt either my morals or my manners!" She laughed softly, and Sir William grew hot in his reply.

"She will hurt no one's, your Grace. Rather others may learn from her. But, indeed, if it gives you pleasure she will do her best to please you from her good heart, which shows equal kindness to the beggars on the quay as to the greatest duchess in England."

"And very commendable!" says her Grace, slowly furling her fan. "Then do me the favour to bring her on the evening of Thursday and then, if you would have a candid opinion, it is yours."

They talked a little longer of other matters; indeed, the Duchess lingered until the sun was low and the shadows long. A man dark-browed and swarthily beautiful, lying

against the pedestal of the marble faun near at hand, took up his guitar, and sang low and sweet in a mellow tenor while she beat time gently with a jewelled hand on her knee.

Mare si lucido,
Lido si caro,
Santa Lucia, Santa Lucia!

The famous song of Naples.

"This is heaven," says she, when the voice was silent, "and you and your Emma trouble yourselves about the weary world! Oh, fools, fools! Forgive me, my good cousin!"

Indeed, it was with a beating heart that Emma prepared for that introduction. Not even to Sir William would she admit how much it signified to her. He viewed it but as the caprice of a lady too great to be crossed. She, as the golden key which might possibly unlock another of the endless gates which stayed her progress. Yet she betrayed no eagerness, no agitation, though it awakened every intelligence to its work. "What would I not do for any relative of my own Sir William's," was all she said when it was laid before her.

But her preparations! She had resolved that she would wear the dress in which the Attitudes should be performed, and indeed it served her well. Had she known her business completely she would never have been seen in anything else.

Behold, then, the Duchess of Argyll's salon in the Villa Columbaia, high, cool and beautiful with the grace of Italian and the comfort of English furnishings. A naked girl in marble, carved by a famous Italian, poised life-size by the windows, running; caught in the flush of her speed with a butterfly perched on her finger.

The Duchess herself sat in a noble chair carved long ago by English workmen, and above her head was a picture of her sister, the dead Lady Coventry, seductive, entrancing, with her long languid eyes. She herself, in an Italian evening gown of purple lustring trimmed with silver gauze, harmonized the incongruities with an odd but delightful unity. There was beside her a great stand of tall and shaded wax candles which shed the most flattering light known to the imagination on her beautiful worn face, and the great bowl of luscious roses at her elbow.

There was only a small party in attendance (for all present had the air of attending her Grace): three or four men, the Lady Diana Beauclerck, the Duke and Duchess de St. Maître and a few more; Lady Diana, sketchbook in hand, for she would never lose the chance of some new and surprising pose of Emma's.

To these, talking and laughing, the lacquey makes his unashamed announcement.

"His Excellency the Ambassador and Mrs. Hart." And the Duchess beholds framed in the tall dim doorway —what? A statue from the Museo come to pay her respects? No, a somewhat tall young woman robed in pure white of some subtly soft material which drapes like Greek marble, and falls in long slender folds to chastely hidden but sandalled feet. Chastely hidden the beautiful bosom also, rounding softly through the veil, but the noble throat, a pillar of ivory, rears itself proudly from the uncovered chest as strongly and finely modelled as that of Diana's swiftest nymph, with room and to spare for ample lungs and untroubled breath. The sleeve is looped to the shoulder on one side, and falls in long drapery on the other. Her face, a little pale with controlled agitation, is serenely sweet and modest. A magnificent young animal in rejoicing health, if no more, thinks the Duchess as Sir William leads the beauty forward and she makes

her reverence before the thronelike chair. Her Grace may then remark the masses of gold-touched bronze hair pressed and calmed down upon the small head that its luxuriance may be controlled into reason, and the rose-red lips above the perfect chin. The eyes are not on show. Mrs. Hart veils them chastely with long lashes. She showed like a lovely survival of the lost glory of Greece among these fashionably dressed ladies—and knew it. The Duchess received her graciously and motioned that a chair be set beside her. Sir William should have nothing to complain of and, indeed, she was curious herself.

"I take it very kind, madam, that you visit me this evening," says she with gentle dignity. "But Sir William has no doubt made my excuses and told you that my physicians forbid any fatigue. Therefore I am compelled to ask my friends to be charitable and favour me with their company when they will be so good."

"Oh, madam, what could I think it but an honour to visit your Grace," says the sweet statue, carefully tutored in her forms of address by the best tutor of the polite world, and then relapses into a graceful silence with bows and smiles to such of the company as she knows; Lady Diana especially warm in her greeting, for there was never an artist heart could hold away from its spiritual kin in Emma.

"And did he tell you that I entreated as a special favour that I might hear what I am told is one of the finest voices of our day?" the Duchess continues.

"Indeed, madam, yes. He told me your Grace would find San Carlo too fatiguing."

"And those famous poses of which I understand the great Goethe has written in terms of such delight?"

"All is at your service, madam. I have come dressed in the antique taste for the purpose. I only beg one favour; that if you find them *ennuyante* you will stop me."

"I promise!" says the Duchess, with a smile which disarms her words.

There was more talk, and refreshments were served, however, before she would put the statue in motion. Mrs. Hart was not to feel she was bidden merely as a raree-show for fashionable folks. Indeed, Lady Diana exhibited first her portfolio of new drawings done for the decoration of one of Mr. Horace Walpole's rooms at his gimcrack castle of Strawberry Hill, and one of the gentlemen, the Duke de San Maître, favoured them with a song, "Napoli bella" and so forth, which Emma applauded with more smiling warmth than any of the party, the Duchess watching her well pleased.

It was her turn next—the poses which gained her the nickname of The Gallery of Statues from the said Mr. Horace Walpole. I will not, I must not particularize, though on such beauty one would linger if possible, but as she melted from one loveliness to another, the Duchess's eyes followed and could not be satisfied. She laughed with the laughing comedy, held her breath while the ruined Cassandra, pointing to the violating Sun, seemed to hurl forth the dreadful prophecies that none regarded, smiled for pure pleasure at the nymph with a tambourine, and so forth through every act of the lovely show—so lovely that even the girl's enemies could not withhold their reluctant praises.

When it was over, she clapped her hands.

"Wonderful, marvellous—I could see it forever and ever! It is a new art. It is painting and poetry and sculpture and the theatre all expressed in one," cried she. "My dear, you have genius. I never saw anything remotely like it. And now—can it be possible that with all these perfections you also have a voice worth hearing? If so, I declare it unjust, preposterous. The most of us have no gifts at all. The few have one, but you—"

"I have called her Pandora, for indeed she has them all," says Sir William, and the gentlemen who understood the classical allusion applauded. And Emma sang. She put her heart into it. She gave them her famous "Luce bella" with ornaments of diamond and crystal clearness that the Banti herself could not have excelled. Her voice sparkled and glittered; nothing more brilliant could be imagined. And then when she had driven them all into the realms of soulless admiration—for what is such art but an exquisite gymnastic?—she led them back into the forests of true romance with a simple ballad from Scotland, in homage to the Duchess whose soft eyes filled with tears in listening.

> They have slain the Earl o' Moray
> And laid him on the green.—

The cry of it! The tears in her soft voice!

> Oh, the bonny Earl o' Moray
> He was the Queen's love.
>
> And lang, lang may his lady
> Look o'er the Castle doun,
> Ere she see the Earl o' Moray
> Come sounding through the toun.

So she ended in a dying sweetness with notes as deep as doom, and would sing no more, and the silence that followed was better than all words. The Duchess drew her near and kissed her cheek without any.

Indeed, Emma spoke little that night. She was conscious herself, to a certain extent, that she was on her promotion. Conscious, too, that there were faults of speech which great ladies might view with scorn unsoftened by the bright beauty which made even these a naïve enchantment to men. She was therefore at her best, nothing breaking

out of control; pliable, gentle, unassuming; in all things obedient and attentive to Sir William.

He drew near the Duchess while Emma at Lady Diana's request poised her tambourine for a rapid sketch in Mr. Walpole's interest. The others had gathered about the pretty sight.

"Your opinion, madam?"

"I am charmed, dazzled. She is a revelation of the most exquisite beauty. There is genius, Sir William. I never saw her like."

"Then you don't condemn me, madam? You don't think me the infatuated fool I am called in some circles?"

"I think you have shown yourself a man of supreme taste. That girl—take care she does not leave you some day and take Europe as a lover instead! Every great capital would be at her feet."

"You forget she loves me. She will not leave me," he said complacently. The Duchess looked at him with pitying eyes.

"You forget, my friend, I fear, that you are sixty, and she—" She pointed with her fan at the radiant figure, incarnate youth, and the men crowding about her to admire. It struck like the chill of death, as a truth known with secret fear to ourselves will do when repeated from other lips.

"I must take my fate like another man!" he answered, with a voice that shook a little. His eyes fell on his hands; beautifully shaped but veined and wrinkled.

"We can't escape Fate," says the Duchess, "but we can evade her for a while."

They looked at each other. "And what would you do?" he asked, turning his eyes away last.

"Marry her!" said the Duchess. Then, hastily, "My friend, it is not my business. I intrude. My Lady Diana, are you for cards?"

CHAPTER XV

ACHIEVEMENT

After this Emma saw the Duchess constantly. She became, indeed, her chief interest in Naples. The girl was so bright and *simpatica* (to use the more expressive Italian) that her Grace could not do without this charming new toy. It may well be imagined the difference this made in her position. No breath had ever sullied the bright mirror of the Duchess's reputation. If it was whispered that the King of England himself had been one of her adorers it was instantly added by the most scandalous that her Grace of Argyll had given him no encouragement. Why should she? A king could offer nothing that she had not, and as for love, she loved her handsome Highlandman, her John of Argyll, quite well enough to be marble to other wooing. Therefore, in all the world Emma could have found no better sponsor. With one or two unbending exceptions all the ladies, English and otherwise, were on her list at last and indemnified her for past insolences by present attentions. She visited the past on none, bore no grudges, received all who came with the same warm-hearted geniality. Sir William observed it with delight and felt his debt to the duchess increase daily.

And still Emma, under all her smiles, was restless and unhappy. There was no security but one for her, and that she could not have, for he made no motion in that direction. And the worst was, she must not tease him.

"It's as much as my place is worth!" said she to herself, recurring to the old kitchen talk of the first days in

London. Perhaps it was a relief to unbend sometimes, when alone, from the high ambrosial elegances of the Olympian heights she had now scaled hand in hand with the duchess.

High indeed, for one day, driving out by special invitation to the Villa Columbaia she found assembled in the garden, beneath the palms and roses, four ladies she knew very well, but one, by sight only—the great, the illustrious Marie Caroline, daughter of emperors, sister of the lovely Marie Antoinette of France, mother of sovereigns to be, Queen of the Two Sicilies. And, as she was ushered trembling along the velvet lawns and beheld Her Majesty, Emma knew very well this was no accident, but a Royal command draped in the casual that it might raise no comment.

"Another door opened!" she thought, as she trod with light, shy feet upon the living velvet. And even if it were alarming, the daughter of the people, the discarded of Up Park, did not flinch as she swept her profound curtsey and rose to attention and received the Royal compliment. Why should she? She knew very well she had gratified the Queen in her rejection of the King's addresses as she had probably never been gratified before in her life in that particular way. She sat beside the Queen and the Duchess with the two ladies in waiting behind Her Majesty's chair and ate her *dolci* in company with them and drank her iced lemonade with perfect but modest composure. The Duchess was proud of her *protégée*. Nothing could be simpler than her dress of India muslin and lavender sash. Not for nothing had Sir William instructed her that the simpler the setting, the more her beauty must shine.

"Una donna rara!" whispered the Queen to the Duchess while Emma exchanged a few words with the Marchesa of San Marco. "Bellissima creatura!" and she overheard

and treasured the words for Hamilton, who was almost surfeited with the sugar-plums rained from augustest heights nowadays.

Little did she think, in looking on the handsome, dark-browed woman faded as with excess of life and nervous energy, of the part they two would play together in days not now so very far distant. She saw in "le roi Caroline," as the diplomats called her, only another key to the security she plotted for—so blind are we to Fate laughing in her sleeve beside us.

But the Queen saw and intended very much more. She had her informants and knew more of Emma's history than did the Duchess. She knew her unequalled influence with the English Ambassador. Had not Acton assured her that he was wax in the hands of his fascinating mistress? And is not an ambassador a tool in the hands of intrigue if deftly used? She knew something also of Emma's discretion, from long observation and from her conduct with the King. In the great game of intrigue which was the life of Marie Caroline, Emma was a pawn not to be despised. What! neglect the smallest consideration with revolution darkening like a storm-cloud over Europe, about to burst in thunder in France, with frightful reverberations along the Mediterranean? Not she indeed! The true daughter of the great Maria Theresa knew better than that. She was graciousness itself to Emma, seasoned, of course, with the condescension which gave it value. To the Duchess she chatted coolly apart when Emma was engaged with the other ladies; words apparently lightly said, but intended to be remembered and repeated.

"I never saw so lovely a being. Does not your Grace agree with me?"

"I never saw but one!" said the faithful Duchess, "And she is in heaven."

The Queen accorded a sigh to beauty so unsympathetically situated, and went on.

"Your Ambassador is devoted to her, I understand, and who can wonder!"

"Certainly, madam, it can surprise no one. Her talents surpass her beauty, if possible. Has Your Majesty heard her sing?"

"No. You will understand, madam, that that was impossible in the circumstances, though I have heard from the King and many more of the delight it is. There is only one thing which surprises me in the whole matter."

"And that?"

"That your distinguished countryman does not marry her. Where else could he hope to find such devotion mingled with everything that can charm? I may say I have watched her behaviour for several years, for a girl in her position must be under the public eye, and her discretion cannot be too highly praised. She seems to have an astonishing natural sense of what is due to herself and others. My only and deep regret is that she is not in the position to which her merits entitle her. No one would receive her more joyfully than I."

"Your Majesty astonishes me!" the Duchess said slowly. She was weighing this utterance with her own, repeated more than once to Hamilton. Naturally it could only appear to her that the Queen's words were prompted by pure admiration of great qualities. The Duchess was no stateswoman and in such matters saw no further than her own charming nose. The Queen drew back a little.

"Oh, madam, I beg ten thousand pardons! I had forgotten that the Ambassador has the happiness to be your Grace's cousin. Let us say no more."

"Pray do not misunderstand me, madam. I have no objection to the thought. I feel, as no doubt Your Majesty does, all the objections which can be made to a man's marrying his openly acknowledged mistress. Still, this is a most exceptional case. My cousin is ageing. It would be almost impossible to find any one so adapted to his life and tastes. I have come to an age myself when I consider the world's opinion much less than the essentials. I believe Your Majesty's suggestion to be a valuable one."

The Queen disclaimed this praise with pretty gestures of head and hands. She blew it off lightly as a soap-bubble. No responsibility in such a case for a daughter of the Cæsars!

"Oh, madam, you misunderstand. It is not for me to offer a suggestion. The saints forbid. This is but my opinion as a private woman. As Queen—you see my position. There must be many great English ladies whom we should welcome here as Ambassadress. Only—I cannot do wrong in expressing the hope that when the chosen comes she may equal the fair Emma in tact and talent, for there are dark days at hand in Europe, and if I mistake not the Mediterranean will be the scene of great events. The Queen of France, my sister, writes to me—no, I dare not repeat her words. But if any one imagines that this raging fire of revolution can be shut up in France and spread no further he is heavily mistaken."

Her eyes darkened and she looked away through the flowers. The Duchess, with no more imagination than the rest of her countrymen and the conviction that because things were well enough already with England they would so remain, passed this off with an indifferent remark on the growing infidelity of France and the

danger of unsettling religion, and in a moment the Queen had drawn the mask over her face again and was talking of the new excavations at Pompeii.

But the conversation dwelt in the Duchess's mind. Every day convinced her more strongly that Hamilton doted upon the wonder-girl. Why should he not be happy in his own way? A little courage and the thing was done. There was no doubt whatever in her mind that it would very much ease his own public position as well as Emma's. The Queen's words left little anxiety on that point. She resolved to speak yet more plainly.

When Emma returned to her Hamilton praise of the Queen was loud on her lips. She was not yet a stateswoman and saw in all that had passed merely a tribute to her own graces, and wrote to that effect to Greville in her next news-letter. It pleased her easy-going good-humour to write to him from time to time and relate these triumphs. Like many women of her type, past was past with her, and unpleasant associations soon dwindled in a comfortable haze of indifference. He really did not matter particularly to her now, but it was agreeable to feel that he knew how highly placed people considered what he had rejected.

This letter gave Greville a vague uneasiness to which he had long been a stranger, the more so because it also sounded the loud trumpet about the Duchess of Argyll's condescension. The Duchess! Emma was climbing indeed!

But to Hamilton her report gave food for deep reflection. He knew Marie Caroline very well. Never a word of hers but was uttered with purpose and tended to some clearly seen end of her own. He listened, reflected, and went off in a day or two to the Villa Columbaia to see the Duchess.

She was lying in the languor of weak health on a long chair in the glorious gardens, shaded from the heat of the sun but rejoicing in the sun-warmed airs that breathed about her. One of her women had been reading aloud to her and Sir William picked up the book when she was dismissed: "Clarissa, The History of a Young Lady of Quality," by Samuel Richardson.

"It is somewhat of an old-fashioned book now," said the Duchess, "but choicely good, as I think, and in my busy life I never had time for it before. Do you know it?"

"Certainly, but I was always inclined to think it overstrained and impossible. How does your Grace to-day?"

"Well, but no better. I think I never shall be better. We Gunnings are not a long-lived race—think of my sister's twenty-seven years. Indeed, I have exceeded my span, but if I fade as gently as I do now in this sweet land, I need not complain."

He responded with real feeling. She charmed him as beautiful things never failed to do, and the pathos of her fading loveliness was poignant.

They talked for a while of family matters very well known to them both, she slowly and steadily leading the way to the subject on her mind. It was the more interesting to her because Emma had devoted the whole of the day before to her service, as she often did now, and there was gratitude mixed with many other considerations.

"Mrs. Hart met the Queen here a few days since," she said at last, playing with her black fan. "I rejoiced to see the favourable impression she made. Her manner was perfect. It never would surprise me to learn she had good blood in her veins."

"I doubt if your Grace would be so confident of that

if you knew the worthy Mrs. Cadogan intimately," Sir William replied, with a smile of memory at some of La Signora Madre's oddities.

"There is always the father!" said the Duchess, smiling in her turn.

"Always—but I suspect him of nothing worse than of being an equally worthy blacksmith."

"Who can tell? In any case, the Queen spoke in a way which—"

"May I hear what she said?"

She related it plainly and simply, not emphasizing a word, adding as she finished:

"My impression is that it would be a relief at the Court here if your relations with Emma were on a more regular footing. No, cousin—don't throw your head up! Don't be angry! No one has the right to interfere with your private life or prescribe, yet it must be owned that it is a delicate matter for the Queen and that an Ambassadress at the Palazzo Sessa would make matters easier in many directions."

"You cannot possibly advise me to marry a woman of her birth, however good and charming, madam? Your kind heart surely misleads you there. The Queen would never receive her; *could* never do so."

"There you are mistaken." The Duchess again repeated the Queen's words, and went on, "I dare not advise you. Who could, in such a matter? But I will ask you a question. Do you believe your Emma to be a bad woman?"

All the gentleman, all the lover in Hamilton spoke in his resolute "No! I believe her to be a good woman, and who should know better than I? But there are reasons—"

They were naturally not perceptible to the Duchess and she went on quietly with her argument.

"Then, if I take your own word for it, here is a good

woman, fallen by pressure of circumstances into a great misfortune. In what does she differ from the charming Clarissa of Richardson's imagination, cruelly ruined but pure in heart? And if this is so, should there not be some reparation?"

Her long soft eyes dwelt kindly, languidly upon him. His mind hovered a moment over the question: from which of many men would that reparation be due? Even between Greville and himself it might be hard to judge! The Duchess knew absolutely nothing of the real facts and her opinion was so much thistledown blown on an idle breeze; yet it pleased and touched him where it eddied towards his own wishes. Still, he held out.

"I am no ruffian violator like Lovelace, madam, and with all her generous qualities Emma is no saint like Clarissa."

"Certainly. She is merely a good and trustworthy young woman, kind-hearted and liberal to a fault. She is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld—but one. Her gifts are surpassing. Taken together they cannot be equalled, and I say so who have seen the world's best for more years than I care to count. So let that slip —but I go too far, my good Sir William. We will not speak of it more."

And though he would willingly have discussed it, for the subject interested him more than anything on earth, her Grace held discreetly away, and her talk was of roses and of scenic, not living beauties, for the rest of the visit.

Get away from it, however, he could not. Emma said nothing, sighed but hinted nothing, and this forbearance piqued him as well as pleased him. Was she drifting into indifference at long last? He looked in the glass. The lines were deepening in his face. His eyes were haggard when he sat up o' nights. He found those madcap

excursions to Capri and Ischia less and less pleasant. When they visited Vesuvius and Emma's quick feet sped nymphlike up the steep ways he was compelled to linger behind worn-out and panting. She bloomed into a more luxuriant beauty as he waned. Suppose she wearied of her old lover? Offers from the greatest and wealthiest men of Europe were hers for the taking—would she refuse them forever? And if she went—oh, cold hearth and creeping age, and loneliness, loneliness forever!

He could not escape his problem. It confronted him at the Palace, when the Queen, business done—for the King was too idle to hear the word, much less endure the thing—asked after the health of the beautiful Mrs. Hart and commented on the Duchess's unfeigned admiration for her.

"And who can marvel? Never was a creature so gifted. I had myself the pleasure to meet her at the Villa Columbaia and was ravished indeed. Her beauty is the least of her recommendations. Her talent, manners, tact!—" She made an eloquent gesture with her quick hands. "Your taste is immaculate!" she added.

"It was so once, madam!" he said with a meaning before which she smiled and blushed a little. It recalled—but royal memories are secret.

"It is so still," she said, and there was a pause, while she trifled with the imperially beautiful roses he had brought her, all curled and pearled with dew.

Sir William considered. He knew the Queen well. Never a word but covered a motive. What was the motive here? Better be frank than fence in vain. She could beat any man at that game.

"Will Your Majesty permit me a question?"

"Certainly, Eccellenza. You can ask nothing but what is proper."

A quick smile flashed and was decorously concealed by Sir William's bow.

"Then, madam, what is Your Majesty's motive in this graciousness to Mrs. Hart and your humble servant?"

That question could never have been asked nor answered but for past relations—long past, but impossible to be entirely forgotten. The Queen toyed with the heavy paperweight of the bronze Caligula upon her table before she answered, and Hamilton, noting the worn lines in her face, the falsely black tresses which he had once thought so beautiful, remembered Greville's maxim: "Nothing is so dead as a dead passion." How could he ever have cared to waken a gleam in the heavy eyes or the tremble of a kiss on the Hapsburg lips which set that family apart from lesser men.

"I will be frank," she said at last. "Why should I not with one of the men who must be the King's right hand in the days I see coming as plainly as I see your face? Your liaison with Mrs. Hart has made difficulties on which I would not dwell, for I would not embarrass my friend by so much as a look. But they are real, and will become more pressing in the days I foresee. I am ignorant whether you know that much mischief has been made for you in high places in England, but in any case you cannot know that, I, through channels of my own, have done my best to protect your interests."

No, that had not occurred to Sir William. He listened with the closest attention. No explanation was needed. As if he had been present he could hear Her Majesty Queen Charlotte, the prim German *hausfrau*, discussing the matter with her circle, could see the plain, honest King's disapprobation of his representative's action in flouting public opinion publicly. Naples was not so far from England but that all its scandals would echo

in London. Marie Caroline noted his expression and continued.

"It is an ever-present terror in my mind that you might some day be superseded here by some younger man higher in the favour of certain influential persons, and I will frankly own that my interest is deeply concerned, for when the trouble is upon us if I have no true friend at the English Embassy, where am I to look for help? You see? It needs no labouring."

"I see, Madam, and words fail me to express my sense of Your Majesty's confidence in me."

He knew that was true. What he did not guess was that behind her words the Queen's swift brain was shaping the thought that if a weak, pleasure-loving man, old and completely in the hands of a fascinating woman likely to be amenable to her own condescensions were removed, she might be checkmated at every turn and England's selfish policy ignore the pressing needs of the Two Sicilies, and her personal ambitions. Her half-frankness served her well. One does not see oneself as others see one—at least of all the Hamiltons of the earth. He thought a moment and added:

"But Mrs. Hart?"

"Mrs. Hart is a woman capable of great things. You cannot suppose I have not made myself acquainted with all her qualities of head and disposition. I have often most deeply and sincerely wished she could be the channel of communications with you which will become invaluable as the revolution darkens down upon us. She is capable of it in every way if I could receive her as a friend—but you know I cannot."

"Let us be plain," said Sir William. "Does Your Majesty mean you could receive the humbly born Emma Hart as a friend if her position were legalized?"

"I could certainly receive the Ambassadress as a

friend. What should stop me? In fact, what else could I do? You would naturally have your King's permission for such a marriage. I have reason to believe it would ease your own position. But this is intruding impertinently on your private life, Eccellenza, and I fear my deep anxiety for the interests of my own kingdom has led me into an impertinence for which I ask your pardon."

It was beautifully said. If Marie Caroline had professed enthusiasm either for beauty or virtue Hamilton would not have believed a word she said. What she put forward he knew to be true, and he could appreciate its weight. Every day, every hour had taught him also that an English-Sicilian alliance would soon be vital to the life of Europe.

He went away with much to consider, to the delightful companionship in which Emma never failed him. Her sweetness was the very sunshine of his age. The mere fear of losing it made the air chill about him.

Another circumstance drove him in the direction where the Queen and the Duchess of Argyll were steadily pointing. Some connections of his, the Heneage Legges, had come to Naples, partly in the train of the Duchess, partly with some discreet curiosity on Mr. Heneage Legge's part as to the *ménage* of the Palazzo Sessa. He had visited in Edgware Row in the Greville days: he possessed his own knowledge and his own views as to the present experiment. Naturally, when he paid his respects to the Ambassador, Mrs. Heneage Legge did not accompany him.

"She would have been delighted to visit you, Sir William, and renew a pleasant acquaintance but my wife's health at present forbids her visiting as largely as she could wish. And you are aware there are also difficulties into which I need not enter."

There was no more to be said. When a lady's health blocks the way a gentleman must stand aside, but Sir William drew his lips tighter, and thought the freedoms of relationship detestable. The laxity of Naples; the Duchess's, the Queen's, consideration had spoiled his sense of the fitness of things. He thought his Emma's company certainly good enough for a Mrs. Heneage Legge, who would probably soon be taught better by the attention paid to the Lady of the Embassy by persons much higher in rank than herself.

And then Emma's good nature precipitated the mischief. She met the lady at the Villa Columbaia and, undaunted by a cold curtsey, must needs volunteer through a lady in waiting of the Queen's to visit and befriend Mrs. Heneage Legge when she was seized by the languorous malaria of the autumn. She sincerely felt for her, but apart from that, anything that could consolidate her position with the English, was valuable.

Mrs. Heneage Legge, with her husband's support, instantly and coolly declined the visit of Hamilton's unwedded wife, the gentleman explaining with painful candour that Emma's "former line of life" made her kind intentions impossible of acceptance.

Emma, as spoilt as Hamilton himself by Neapolitan attentions, was furious, but had the tact to keep her temper to herself. Pale and in tears, her kindness flung back upon her, despised and scorned, she touched every chivalrous string of Hamilton's heart. It was vain to rage against Heneage Legge, who certainly had the right to choose his wife's acquaintances, but Sir William felt the position was rapidly becoming unendurable, and his alternatives shrinking to the choice between parting with Emma forever and making her Lady Hamilton. For a month more, he vacillated pitiably, and still Emma's new wisdom kept silence. Palely and quietly she accepted the

insult as he could not, and shutting herself up would go nowhere. How could she face the cruel world? Heneage Legge meanwhile sounded his note of warning in a hasty letter to Greville.

"Her influence over him exceeds all belief. The language of both parties, who always spoke in the plural number—we, us, and ours—staggered me at first, but soon made me determined to speak to him on the subject, when he assured me, what I confess I was most happy to hear, that he was not married, but flung out some hints of doing justice to her good behaviour, if his public situation did not forbid him to consider himself an independent man. I am confident she will gain her point, against which it is the duty of every friend to strengthen his mind as much as possible. And she will be satisfied with no argument but the King's absolute refusal of his approbation.

"Her Attitudes are beyond description beautiful and striking and I think you will find her figure much improved since last you saw her.

"They say they shall be in London by the latter end of May, that their stay in England shall be as short as possible, and that having settled his affairs he is determined never to return. She is much visited here by ladies of the highest rank and many of the *corps diplomatique*."

Across that letter the nearly frantic Greville might have scrawled the words *Too late* when he received it. The whole thing was his own doing, his mistaken kindness to Emma and Sir William, and he was now hoist with his own petard. Had ever a man been so betrayed by his own virtues?

For a few days after Heneage Legge's letter reached him, Sir William, coming in at sunset from the Villa

Columbaia, found Emma in the room of the mirrors, leaning her chin on her hand, her arm on the window-sill commanding the noble view of sea and islands—Vesuvius fluttering a pennon of smoke into the blue. Her face was still and quiet, a melancholy resignation shadowed it—the look of one who relinquishes something infinitely precious and turns with patience to sadder duties. He came and sat beside her, and together they looked out at the evening star swimming in rosy vapours.

Presently, and very gently, he spoke.

"Emma, this cannot last. I have seen your grief and felt it most sensibly in my own heart. For years now you have been my true and faithful wife in all but name—"

She looked up in mute terror.

"Would it make you happier if the bond were broken? You can never be dearer to me than you are at this moment, for I love and trust you beyond all words. But, if it be your wish to *leave* me—"

Still she looked at him in strained, terrified expectation, her lips apart, white with fear. He turned his face from her and, with infinite hesitation and reluctance, said, slowly:

"I see that cannot be. We cannot part. We have grown too close together. Therefore I ask you to be my wife, if that is your desire. I will not fail you; neither, I think, will you fail me."

She fell upon her knees, sobbing hysterically, and hid her face against him.

CHAPTER XVI

TRIUMPH

London and triumph—so dizzy and dazzling that Emma might have almost repeated her favourite saying that she did not know whether she was on her head or her heels. Almost, only, for success had given her a confidence so robust that she foresaw none but glittering vistas. "Alone I did it!" was her pride. Not to Greville, not to Hamilton, but to her own conquering personality was the victory due, and looking about her she saw none to rival her and therefore none to fear. There might be one or two women as beautiful in the eyes of men whose taste was on a lower plane than Sir William's, she thought, but that was beauty only expressing itself in feature, whereas in herself it overflowed into such song, such pose, that Gallini, the famous impresario, offered her £2000 a year and two benefits if she would engage with him, whereupon Sir William gaily retorted that he had engaged her for life. Was it wonderful that she should see herself laurel-crowned, almost divine?

For life! and Greville had to bear this amazing result of his plot with what fortitude he could muster. The shock was so great that it was really not fortitude but the stoicism of good breeding which alone carried him through. Could he ever forget that first meeting with the lovers at Sir William's hotel? Even his frosted heart beat a little quicker as he climbed the broad shallow stairs. He could not for the life of him tell what Emma would be at when the door opened. Would she have changed, grown distant and formidable, less or more

beautiful? Would she triumph vulgarly? (He could imagine that very well.) Would all the plotting facility which had placed her where she was be turned mercilessly against his interests henceforward! And would his dear Hamilton look the fool which in every fibre Greville felt him to be? The contradictions so confused him that at last he could only say within himself—"Emma! Good God!"—almost stupefied at the work of his own hand, and abandon himself to fate.

The door opened. Hamilton was in an armchair reading a letter to her, she perched on the arm like a child, one hand about his neck. Greville bowed at the door and advanced with cordial haste.

"My dear Emma, my dear Hamilton!" unpleasantly conscious of a flush which seemed to pervade his whole being and not his face alone.

She ran forward with the prettiest grace imaginable and caught his outstretched hand, looking back for Hamilton as he came up behind her.

"Oh, Greville, and do we see you once more? Sir William and me was longing for this hour. Take his other hand, Sir William, and then it will be the three of us again."

She put his hand in his uncle's, and beamed upon both as gay and innocent as a lamb in a May meadow. There was no speck of cloud in the untroubled deeps of the eyes he remembered so well, nothing but happiness. He took the hand and kissed it.

"What am I to call your Lady Hamilton?" said he, smiling at his uncle.

"Emma—what else? She is not changed in heart, Greville. But look at her and see what Italy has done!"

"What *you* have done!" she corrected gravely, and stood with dropped hands at attention to be viewed.

But Greville's keen eyes had already drawn their con-

clusion. "More beautiful," they told him, "more womanly; dignity and elegance at her command to be used like her *cachemire* when necessary, and laid aside for the old free-and-easy when she relaxed. Younger looking than even her four and twenty years—the bud unfolded into perfect beauty, the blossomed rose."

Sir William looked much older. The journey had wearied him and the wild round of gaiety in London teased him. He wanted respite and could not get it, for every fashionable in the town was wild to see the coming Ambassadress, and it is possible that even Emma herself might have been daunted if she could have guessed the stories with which the blank if not the virgin pages of her early life were adorned. Hamilton knew them. Despairing friends plucked at the skirts of his garment at the last moment, with these legends, to save him from a fate impossible for an ambassador. He sickened of London and longed for Naples and the sunshine.

"You have seen the King?" Greville asked, when they had talked a while.

"Certainly. He was most gracious. I am given a privy councillorship. Emma, my love, have you forgot your appointment with Romney?"

She hesitated a second, invisibly, to all but Greville's keenness, then stooped and kissed Sir William's cheek.

"Why, of course! I was so glad to see Greville I had all but forgot poor Romney. Only two hours, and then when I come back we dress for the Duke of Queensberry's reception. The Prince of Wales will be there."

She challenged Greville, with her bright bold smile, to injure her! Fear to leave him alone with Sir William? Not she! and so presently tripped out of the room in her big hat all plumes and the white silk cloak about her shoulders. Greville attended her to the carriage, and stood bareheaded, reminiscent of many past hackney

coaches on the same errand, as it bore her away to Romney's studio. She had forgotten to ask concerning little Emma, now a fine buxom girl of nine, whose last school bill lay receipted in his pocket. He turned and went slowly up the stair, reflecting.

"And what do you think of her?" was the first eager question. It seemed that Hamilton could think of nothing else. He looked even older now she was gone; it was as when the sun dies off a landscape.

"Most beautiful," Greville answered with his carefully regulated enthusiasm. "Immensely, unspeakably improved."

"Worth a little sacrifice, eh?"

"Certainly. If worth a great one no one but yourself can tell. I suppose you had great difficulties with the King about his consent?"

"On the whole, not so bad as I expected. I won't hide from you, who have all my confidence, that he was extremely reluctant. I could see the Queen had primed him. He leaned chiefly on difficulties with the Neapolitan Court and I could honestly reassure him there. Indeed, I was able to show him a letter that Marie Caroline wrote me before leaving, expressing her warm interest and kindness for Emma. It went a long way. He agreed finally, and offered the privy councillorship."

Greville reflected.

"A great honour. Did you see the Queen?"

"No. But I have no doubt that Emma will win her way when we are married. No one can resist her. I may say her life is one triumphal progress."

"It promised to be long since," said Greville politely. "Has she acquired more placidity of temper than we used to remark in her?"

"Undoubtedly. Sometimes I have seen the little struggle, for she is naturally impetuous, but it is instantly

suppressed. She owes much to your instruction, my dear Greville."

"You are too partial. Tell me—does she cherish any resentment against me? Be candid. Women are unreasonable, and though it has crowned her happiness and yours, still she may be sore on that point—you understand?"

"Perfectly. But no, not in the least. She speaks of you with just the calm affection I desire. One of her chief pleasures in looking forward was to see you. I believe I express the truth in saying she mourned sincerely over Miss Middleton's folly and would do all in her power to aid you in any way."

Of that Greville believed what he pleased, but when he and Sir William proceeded arm in arm to the club he was at least assured that for the present the sword was sheathed.

The truth was, she was in such an Elysium that she thought little of him and was as ready to be cordial to overflowing as she would have been with Sir Harry Fetherstonehaugh or any other reminder of a past which might never have existed as far as she was concerned. Incapable of bearing ill-will to any man, and to few women, she credited all the world with as happy-go-lucky a forgetfulness as her own. Reserve and delicacy were qualities unknown to her except as Attitudes, and they troubled none of her relations with Greville in the new rôle of aunt and nephew.

But Romney! He had seen in the *Gazette* that Sir William had arrived, but knew not the great tidings as yet not publicly announced. How should he? He had shrunk into his shell more than ever and except for his art the world went its way and left him stranded on the beach. Would she send for him? Come? A little shiver like the turn of the sap in spring in the cold veins of

trees seemed to stir feebly about his heart because she was near.

A little tap at his door. It opened very slowly. The white fold of a woman's dress fluttered in like a butterfly on the breeze from the opened door without. He saw the gleam and swung his chair right about. The door was pushed back, and, framed in the darkness behind, he saw her.

Yes, but he could not move. He could not speak. He stared at her, hollow-eyed. Was it real? So often in dream and waking vision that door had stirred and she had stood, still, smiling, exactly as she stood now, living, with glowing lips and cheeks, sweet, sweet, inexpressibly, and yet had melted away into emptiness and distance as he looked. It would be that and no more this time also. He looked down with a long sigh on his knotted empty hands, and dreaded to be cheated into joy.

She could not bear it a moment longer. Her warm heart overflowed, and quick as a sunbeam she danced along the floor and caught him about the neck, forcing his face upwards.

"Mr. Romney—oh, Mr. Romney, I've come back to you. Are you glad? I'm so glad I don't know what to do. Look up, or I'll run away again!"

He felt the loving living arms about him. In no dream had he heard her voice—that voice of heart's music—no dream had kissed his cheek with rose-warm lips.

"Emma? Emma?"—he said at last, in a thick muffled voice that made its way through a long-heaped silence; and then the life she brought with her flowed quicker through his blood and woke him to her sunshine.

"Is it true?" he asked at last, and she, her heart almost overflowing at her eyes, assured him it was Emma—

"the same, same Emma that can never change to you. No, not if she lives to be a hundred."

She calmed him after that. She had two hours—two whole golden hours! And see! They would have their meal together, just the same as in the old dear days. Was there a loaf in the cupboard; and eggs?

No, not one. Then what did he mean? Was he going to starve? No, wait, wait! She had her plan.

She caught up her old basket in a dusty corner, itself all dusty and cobwebbed, but still preserved, and down the stair with her, and off to the nearest shop she could find; and that was near for she had not forgotten a step of the way. And presently she returned, with her little parcels, to find him at the front door staring bewildered lest she should be flown off to Naples like a witch on a broomstick; and so up the stairs, and to the little stove where he had his lonely kettle a-boil and all his rusty, dusty materials for tea; and tucked up her sleeves and made her buttered toast and fried her sausages and sat him down to eat with her while she ate also with her hearty young appetite and talked with a full mouth and a fuller heart of the Neapolitan triumphs.

That was Emma at her best and loveliest. It is arguable, nor can I refute it, that let who will possess her, Romney had the most of her after all. He drew some divine essence from her that the others could not—no, not even Nelson, though he came nearest. He saw the soul in her freed from all contradictions and flaws—pure essence, spiritual beauty. And whether he was wrong or immortally right, God only knows, who made her so beautiful.

So he listened, elbows propped on the table, and greedy eyes devouring every play of light and dark across her face—worshipping once more at the altar of the Divine Lady.

But now she must come near the central truth of her strange, eventful history—her marriage. And that would wing a dart, she knew full well, for what have poor painters to do with ambassadresses rising in apotheosis into rosy clouds of flattery and grandeur?

"Sir William loves me beyond all you could imagine, Mr. Romney"—she said, delaying a little.

"What else could he do? What else can any of 'em do? Tell me news, Emma. Tell me he stays in England now he's here."

"Alas, no, my dear, dear friend. His duties take him back to Naples."

"And you with him?"

"And I with him. As his wife."

She sat half frightened, half triumphant, with the man looking at her open-mouthed, fixed. She answered the beseeching in his face.

"Yes, it's true. His wife."

"But not yet—not yet?"

"In a few days. But then we stop here awhile. Oh, Mr. Romney, you shall paint me on my wedding day."

"Your wedding day. No. He'll want you with him."

"Then he shan't have me; but he's good, he'll understand. Would I not be with my friend that happy day? Dear sir, you shall paint the Ambassadress, and it shall be—oh, better than Circe, than Cassandra, than them all!"

She caught him up in her own joy and whirled him away, leaving not a moment for thought or grief. All centred on the picture. And so it remains—immortal, for he threw his great heart, his great brain into it, and the colours were mingled with his life blood in that most noble portrait. She sits, little hands with the new wedding ring clasped upon the arm of her chair. Some one has disturbed her meditation—her Excellency the Am-

bassadress is needed; she turns her face, the lovely oval chin and curved lips upon the happy beholder. The eyes under the long arched brows are full of gentle reserves and soft dignity. Not any Circe nor Cassandra now, but Emma Hamilton, herself at last. We may believe that Hamilton loved that picture, for it represented her as all he wished and believed her—worthy indeed of the great gifts he had given.

But the world went on its way, and from that day onward the fribbles of fashion crowded about her. She swept them away also in the strong current of her marvellous vitality. Mr. Horace Walpole wrote wittily enough that the Nymph of the Attitudes had conquered —"Sir William Hamilton's pantomime mistress, who acts all the antique statues in an Indian shawl." So he said, burning to see the sight like the rest of them. He favoured the Duke of Queensberry's reception that night at Richmond with a chosen few that he might see her with Sir William glowing with pride to display his conquering Beauty. Let us hear the Arbiter of Fashion and of Taste.

"On Saturday evening I was at the Duke of Queensberry's (at Richmond *s'entend*) with a small company, and there were Sir W. Hamilton and Mrs. Hart, who on the 3rd of next month, previous to their departure, is to be made *Madame l'Envoyeé à Naples,* the Neapolitan Queen having promised to receive her in that quality. *Here* she cannot be presented, where only such overvirtuous wives as the Duchess of Kingston and Mrs. Hastings, who could go with a husband in each hand, are admitted. I had only heard of her Attitudes, and those, in dumb show, I have not yet seen. Oh, but she sings admirably; has a very fine strong voice; is an excellent buffa and an astonishing tragedian. She sung 'Nina'

in the highest perfection, and there her attitudes were a whole theatre of grace and various expressions."

So Mr. Walpole's world was conquered (with reservations) and she thought it conquered wholly.

They were married at Marylebone church on the 6th September, 1790, in the twenty-fifth year of her age, and the witnesses were my Lord Abercorn, Sir William's cousin, and Mr. Dutens, and fashion laughed at Sir William as it had never laughed yet. Indeed, it had believed he might escape the adventuress at the last moment—the dotard! And Mr. Walpole wrote again to his Miss Berrys that "*Apropos*, Sir W. Hamilton has married his Gallery of Statues, and they are set out on their return to Naples."

And Emma spent that eventful day with her friend and gave him the last sitting of so many; the last forever.

That friendship and Sir William's true affection stand out as the sole and touching realities of the unreal froth and laughter and slighting jest with Mr. Walpole's aged cynicism leading the rabble rout. He may have been right in his valuation—he would have declared that after years proved him immaculately so, had he lived to jest when that time came—but his light cruelties hover, a malarial glitter of corruption, above the Lethe where all dead things roll to their doom in the sullen flood; and Romney's adoration and her husband's fidelity shine like fixed stars in every memory of her fair face, and will illuminate her with tenderness until her beauty is forgotten.

Her gratitude to her husband! She could never make him amends for his goodness. What did it matter that the cold Queen of England refused to receive her? He

had restored her to all a woman could value. She wrote to her faithful Romney:

"I am the happiest woman in the world. Sir William is fonder of me every day, and I hope he will have no corse to repent of his goodness to me. But why do I tell you this? You know me enough. You was the first dear friend I opened my heart to. You ought to know me, for you have seen and discoursed with me in my poorer days. How grateful then do I feel to my dear, dear husband, that as restored peace to my mind, that as given me honours, rank, and what is more, innocence and happiness. Rejoice with me, my dear sir, my friend, my more than father. Believe me, I am still that same Emma you knew me. Tell Hayley I am allways reading his 'Triumphs of Temper,' it was that that made me Lady H. for God knows I had for five years enough to try my temper and I am afraid if it had not been for the good example Serena taught me, my girdle would have burst, and if it had I had been undone for Sir W. minds more temper than beauty. He therefore wishes Mr. Hayley would come that he might thank him for his sweet-tempered wife. I swear to you I have never once been out of humour since the 6th of last September. God bless you."

Her dear warm heart! He kissed that letter as he laid it aside, and dreamed of a visit to Naples to bask in her sunshine, a dream that melted into nothing.

So they set out to Naples, Ambassador and Ambassadress of England, visiting on the way the sad, foreboding Marie Antoinette of France, and bearing with them in Emma's bosom her last letter to her sister Marie Caroline of the Two Sicilies. To such honour is the once for-

lorn Emma come! It would have been much to witness the meeting of those two beautiful creatures, on whom the hand of Destiny was so strangely laid.

And they returned to the Palazzo Sessa. To live happy ever after? At least it began with all due splendour. Marie Caroline redeemed her promise and broke, in Lady Hamilton's favour, the rule which forbids any sovereign to receive a woman who cannot be presented at her native Court. Not only so—Mrs. Hart was forgotten. That lady had, for social purposes, never existed, and the daughter of the Hapsburgs took the daughter of the blacksmith to her bosom on the footing of closest, most intimate friendship. Her keen eyes were fixed steadily on the storm blackening in France, rolling up the sky and slowly extinguishing the sun. Let who would doubt its coming, she would be prepared. She could not do enough for the representatives of England, and all the world followed her example. Surely the past was buried under the radiant present as the drowned corpses lie beneath the blue Mediterranean, and if a memory, like a white face, ever floated up to the sparkling surface, it was easy for Emma Hamilton to forget it when the next ripple carried it out to sea. All the English ladies, even their young daughters, were at her feet now. Perhaps she did not quite realize that the English in foreign countries live by a different code from the English in England. She was to understand that later.

It was for the first time worth Hamilton's while to train her in politics, for the quick wit that aided him at every turn could be made useful in his diplomatic work also. It grew more irksome as he grew older, and as France, sinister, menacing as Vesuvius itself, threatened to break forth in ruining flames and lava. Emma could spare him a little here and there on the lighter side, he

thought. Certainly she could and did copy and rewrite some of his despatches and was developing into a capable secretary.

It puzzled her, wearied her a little at first, but when she understood that it helped him, that even the Queen's chance words to her repeated to him (but were they ever chance?) were of interest and value, she caught up that rôle of stateswoman, and played it as she did all the others. After all, an ambassadress should be in the secrets of her trade. *She* would show them that there too she was at home. Not for nothing had Greville written to Sir William in the early days of the plot against her, "Emma's passion is admiration, and it is capable of aspiring to any line which will be celebrated, and it would be indifferent when on that key whether she was Lucretia or Sappho or Scævola or Regulus, anything grand, whether masculine or feminine she could take up."

She could, indeed. She would show them now, King, Queen, Hamilton, Greville, the World, that there was nothing beyond her, and the more difficult the better. She would win the Royal admiration, and with it under the Queen's and Hamilton's tuition she studied her new rôle—the politics of Europe. There, too, she would be prima donna, and Marie Caroline, used to the choice of instruments, tested this one in little things, and her heart rejoiced within her. For the day of great things was drawing on.

PART III

CHAPTER XVII

NELSON

1793

The terror and chaos which dominated the France of the Revolution had at last overflowed her coasts, and the vision of Marie Caroline was realized before the eyes of all the world. Driven by fear and hatred and a nascent sense of power, the young tiger that had tasted blood and mastery was not only standing at bay as formerly, but now making alarming springs on neighbouring territory. Here and there his swift paw struck and left its bleeding scores. What hope was there for Europe but a coalition, not only against the armed forces of France but also against her new and frightful gospel of Death to Despotism, to the Aristocrats, to the Kings? Death also to God—no peace until the last king had been strangled in the bowels of the last priest. One after another, silently, tremblingly, rallying, led by Austria whose royal daughter was in the hands of the murderers, the European nations herded together as frightened cattle herd when the howl of the wolf is heard at midnight.

It is easy now for armchair philosophers to trace the features of liberty behind the mask of the Medusa and to hold to the belief that the root of democracy was watered by the blood that drenched the soil of France—not only royal blood, be it remembered, but the blood of the people also. It was more difficult at the end of the eighteenth century when, to most sober men, France had

become a madness drunk with abominations, wild with bloody and sexual license, a shame to look upon, the enemy of God and man.

The Queen of the Two Sicilies certainly made that view her religion and conscience. It was not wonderful. Every fragment of her mother's, the great Empress Maria Theresa's, policy, was being trampled to pieces by the French republicans before her eyes. Her doomed sister was in their hands, tortured daily and nightly with every fiendish cruelty the mind of man and woman could conceive—widowed by the guillotine, discrowned, and drawing daily nearer to the same fate. For, as Danton cried in his tremendous image: "The coalized kings threaten us; we hurl at their feet, as gage of battle, the head of a king."

And the reply of the kings and peoples was to ring the French about with fire as enemies of all the harvest that painful ages have brought to mankind. They had sown the tares, they should reap them. And it may be that the historian of the twentieth century may write that that sowing and reaping are not even yet finished for the world.

And besides all these universal concerns, Marie Caroline, as Queen of the Two Sicilies (for her husband counts for nothing save as the sand in the machinery of her rule), had her own cruel anxieties. She doubted the strength of Austria and the policy of her brother the Emperor, she was aware that her husband's brother, the miserable King of Spain, was angling for French favour at the instance of a wife who would have sold Spain's honour in exchange for the crown of the Two Sicilies for her son. She looked out into the world with almost hopeless eyes, and saw but one star of hope—England.

Could England unmoved behold Italy and Sicily in French hands, coldly withdrawing herself from European

intrigues and bloodshed? If she could do this, all was over.

England, as usual, hesitated and temporized. The quality of swift decision has never been national, though many a great Englishman has flashed it out in emergency. She acted with a caution so cold that to many English hearts it appeared weakness. Advice was sent from the English Cabinet to the Queen to make peace while yet she could with France—the rising star of war. She could not if she would. Daily the position grew worse as the doctrines of mob-anarchy filtered along the Mediterranean coasts and among their inflammable southern peoples. The inaction of England drove her almost frantic. What! England, Mistress of the seas, Ruler of India, was it possible for her to behold unmoved the Mediterranean become a French lake, and Antichrist enthroned in every European capital but London? And yet it seemed that this very thing might be.

And then the last weight was thrown into the peace scale of English patience and it dropped. Marie Antoinette was guillotined, and even in Marie Caroline's anguish she realized that her sister had not died in vain. That event touched the conscience of Europe with horror —that and all the cruel circumstances involved. By itself alone it could not have effected it, but as the last snowflake fluttering on the massed snow tilts its equilibrium until it rushes down in roar and ruin, so that horror, perhaps no worse than many precedent, called England to arms. War was declared, and the great arsenal of Toulon seized by the British Admiral Lord Hood. The day that news reached the Queen her wearied eyes flashed dominant once more. "We have them!" she said.

But not yet. There was much, much yet to be done before the guns of Trafalgar should open a conquering road for those of Waterloo, and with the grim dogged

patience of her ancestry Marie Caroline settled down to the long struggle. Who could hope that the interests of a little kingdom like the Two Sicilies should loom large in the councils of a power like England? What would the English care if the Bourbon Royalties were driven from Naples? They were but a name to the islanders.

With trembling but resolute care she surveyed her hopes and weapons, Acton was a clear-headed man, but somewhat of a lath painted to look like iron. No one knew that better than the Queen now, whatever had been her opinion at first. Still, though an Irishman, he was strongly pro-British and imbued with the necessary hatred of the French and all their works, Hamilton was old—too much of the dilettante, his interest keener in an unearthed statue, a strayed gem from the Medici collections, than in all the protocols of Europe—clear-headed certainly, life-practised in the tortuous ways of diplomacy; but old; lacking in zest and fire. Yet, considering all this with the frigid judgment of a statesman, Marie Caroline felt his value still. He belonged to one of the ruling families of England, he was connected with the King by ties which had not broken even in the strain of his marriage with Emma, and was universally respected as a man of high character—the English type of the great gentleman, self-possessed and cool in dangerous times. Nor had his marriage injured him except with a few scandalous old women of both sexes. Emma, supported by the Queen, had worn her honours excellently, without either flaunting or shame. Quick as lightning to assimilate even the unspoken hint, and to take colour from the society about her, she filled her post to perfection. The Queen and Hamilton between them modelled and drilled her into the Ambassadress and by 1793 the work was finished. The born great lady, cold and dignified, could never have suited the Neapolitans from the Queen downward so well

as this warm-hearted, kindly, eager, beautiful creature who yet could dazzle the world with her graces and again chill it, if necessary, with the "Majesty and Juno air," of which she had written to Greville years before. And in this emergency it was to Emma the Queen's mind chiefly turned.

To Emma! Amazing stroke of fate! Emma herself might have hesitated to believe it possible in spite of all her self-confidence, if it had not come so gradually.

First, the Queen's exceeding graciousness, the private receptions, the long intimate talks ranging from embroidery silks to English manners and customs, to the talk of the Lazzaroni—that curious population peculiar to Naples—basking about the piers in sunshine. Then the open favour—the Royal horses at Emma's disposal, the Royal grooms to attend her when her Excellency the Ambassadress rode abroad; not now madcap and gay as on the Sussex Downs, but sedately as becomes a great lady. A very great lady, worthy to be courted by the others of the kind who frequented Naples.

"Emma," wrote Hamilton to Greville, "has had a difficult part to act, and has succeeded wonderfully, having gained by having no pretensions, the thorough approbation of all the English ladies. She goes on improving daily. She is really an extraordinary being."

Did not the quick Queen know that even better than Hamilton? She had seen it years before. Very gradually, and without any very clear understanding on her part, Emma was pushed into the centre of an English party at the Court of Naples. What more natural and proper in her position? And so where neither the Queen nor her influence could appear, Emma could, and openly.

It became Marie Caroline's amiable custom to send little messages to the English Ambassador through his charming wife, whom she saw almost daily Acton, too,

was often of the party, and the Queen and he would discuss political matters before Emma; matters in which her interest soon awakened and which she could discuss intelligently. She had always responded to education from the Greville days onward, and the Queen and Acton were educating her carefully now for a rôle she little suspected. It amused and pleased Hamilton, who did his share of the work at home.

But it was not her advice they wanted at first. It was the co-operation of an unsuspected intermediary, ardent, devoted, full of boundless energy. And they secured it. Tact also. There, too, the Queen could trust her Emma. See how she writes to the friendly Greville, who is rigidly all that is courteous and kind to his uncle's childless wife:

"I have no pretensions nor do I abuse Her Majesty's goodness, as she observed at Court at Naples (when) we had a drawing-room in honner of the Empress having brought a son. I had been with the Queen the night before alone, *en famille*, laughing, singing, etc., etc., but at the drawing-room I kept my distance and payd the Queen as much respect as tho' I had never seen her before, which pleased her very much. She showed me great distinction that night and told me several times how much she admired my good conduct. You may imagine how happy my dear, dear Sir William is. We live more like lovers than husband and wife, as husbands and wives go nowadays. Lord deliver me! and the English are as bad as the Italians some few excepted."

Greville smiled his little bitter smile which aged more quickly than he did, as he read Emma's moralities. Women! He wondered whether a sense of humour would save Emma from her absurdities. And to him!—to him, of all men! But like many beauties she never had a sense

of humour, scarcely even of fun. She had many other gifts, however, and used them.

Certainly Sir William was satisfied, and with reason. It was Emma now for the exact degree of attention to be shown to a Princess travelling *incognita*, the exact degree of discouragement to ladies whose rank was impeccable but reputations a little too damaged even for Neapolitan easiness. Emma withdraws herself with dignity from revels which are over-rompish for her newly-refined taste, and Sir William applauds.

"Let them all roll on the carpet—provided you are not of the party. My trust is in you," he writes.

And safely. Emma, the Ambassadress, is more inclined to magnify her office than to roll on the carpet with it. Great ladies, the truly great, do not commit such *faux pas*. She mused often over the unspoken lessons in demeanour of the sweet Gunning Duchess, now gone to rejoin her lost and lovely sister. Emma had studied that soft dignity to some purpose, and if the original Eve broke forth sometimes primitive and unashamed, who can blame her?

She sat one day in her room of the mirrors dressed in her white morning negligée and looked out upon the blue bay, with many thoughts of public anxiety. It was dawn, and a golden calm subdued the water into a peace so exquisite that it quieted her into a serene delight. They were to spend the day alone, and she was glad; a little tired of unceasing anxiety and the long uneasy talks with the Queen and Acton. The air was full of trouble; she hankered sometimes for the good old days when all was gaiety and gladness by the blue sea that has seen so many revellers come and flit away into the darkness for ever. And as she leaned and watched in pleasant idleness, a ship hove in sight, far-off but drawing in slowly and steadily with white sails set to catch every drift of the faint morning breeze—a great ship with yawning ports

along her chequered sides, with the English ensign flying; English, therefore, and certainly a news-bearer.

She started up and caught at Sir William's glass, steadying it against a flower-stand and kneeling while she looked. Yes—English.

Good God! Sir William must know.

He was not in his room and she sent Teresa flying all over the house to search for him. No—His Excellency was out. He had dressed and gone hastily down to the water's edge. Then he knew—he had known before she did. She knelt down and resumed her glass. Presently, their own boat pulling off from the pier. That would be Sir William in the stern and one of the secretaries. Which, she could not be sure. Now they were nearing the big ship as she turned, rounded broadside on to the windows, and Emma, through the slid-back panes, could hear the great rattle when the mighty anchor loosed from the catheads sent blue water flying as it sought its home below. And then the thunder of the Royal salute to the flag of the Two Sicilies flying on Uovo and Nuovo. Twenty-one guns. She put her hands to her ears, laughing for pride and pleasure as the roar of the Lion sent the wild echoes flying. These Neapolitans—they should see the might of her own people at last; the floating battlements which alone stood between them and the French devils. She clapped her hands when gun after gun thundered along the Bay, and Uovo and Nuovo responded with feebler crackling honours.

What! The Royal Barge putting out to the ship, and at this early hour! And that was the King in the stern if ever she saw him. Then that was Marie Caroline's doing; a special honour to the ship representing the friend of the Two Sicilies. She saw her husband's boat draw back politely, and the Royal barge gained the rope ladder first with Sir William's hovering attendant, and the

boatswain's shrill pipe cut the morning air, and the officers gathered at the gangway, and she could see the King laboriously ascending the rope ladder, Sir William following, and a bright bugle call was heard, and then, for watchers ashore, the scene was closing unless one cared to watch the boats making off hot-foot from the shore with cargoes of fruit and vegetables very acceptable to men so long afloat as the bluejackets of the English Fleet.

Emma did not. With Teresa she made such a careful toilette as a beautiful young woman of twenty-seven would naturally achieve with hospitalities of importance to come. The Captain and all the officers on leave would be entertained at the Embassy. Indeed, the Queen might send for her any moment to discuss the news, whatever it might be. Word had already reached the Embassy that the ship was the *Agamemnon*—detached from the English fleet blockading Toulon. Good God! What was the news? But no one was sure, though wild rumours were flying about and nearly all the population on the quays. She lived at the window that morning, and watched the Royal barge return with all the honours, and received a messenger who came from Sir William with news that preparation must be made for the guests she expected. She was half frantic with suspense.

An hour went by. Evidently long private discussions between the Ambassador and the Captain. Good Heavens! Why couldn't they talk as well ashore? And then again the boatswain's piercing call, and the Embassy boat at the ladder, and Sir William clambering down slowly hand under hand, and a slight man in uniform taking the descent as to the manner born. She had heard, but could not for the life of her remember, who commanded the *Agamemnon*.

She hurried into the great reception room where the morning sun was darting bright rays through the ja-

lousies, and lighting up the low broad settees, the polished tables with Sir William's articles of *virtu* displayed upon them, the glassed cabinets where yet more precious treasures lurked, and the huge pottery bowls full of the glorious flowers which poured into the house summer and winter alike. A gracious setting for any woman.

Steps. Voices—Sir William's a little excited; she knew that note! A strange voice answering. A group of uniformed men at the door, the Ambassador leading and waving the Captain to precede him.

"Emma, my love. Captain Horatio Nelson of the *Agamemnon*. Lady Hamilton, sir. He brings the news that Toulon is in our hands."

She had started to her feet to curtsey ceremoniously, when the last words caught her ear, and then, radiant, rejoicing, the Ambassadress caught his hand in both her own.

"Toulon ours? Oh, sir, you are God's messenger as well as our King's. Thank God. Thank God."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NEAPOLITAN COURT

Captain Horatio Nelson was at this time thirty-four years old, and far from despicable in person. He was slender almost to a fault and so small-boned that most observers classed him as a little man, which was far from true, since he touched middle height, and bore himself well and serenely except when suddenly agitated; and then his nervous temperament sparkled in his eyes and twitched his mobile lips. His brows were arched and gave a clear lift to the penetrating eye beneath; his forehead lofty and commanding. Yet it is possible these characteristics might be read into the face by later knowledge rather than by present observation, and to Emma, not so quick to read character as to feel and humour it insensibly, he appeared at first sight an ordinary sea-captain in the ordinary plain uniform (devoid even of epaulettes) of the time. His consequence lay in the news he brought, and his interest to her personally in the fact that he had a petition from his Admiral, my Lord Hood, to be preferred at the Neapolitan Court, which she might raise her own consequence by aiding.

When they were alone, Sir William gave her the necessary outlines.

"I am impressed with the air of this young man, my love. He met the King with the utmost composure and appeared so full of business as to have room for nothing else. Important business indeed. Toulon is in our hands, but troops, troops are of all things needful and Lord Hood has sent the *Agamemnon* to beg for them. I know

what the Queen's mind will be, but the King's jaw dropped. He is willing enough to take his subsidy from England, but not to spend a penny of it but on his own fancies. Work for my Emma!"

She opened the subject again with Nelson, whom she found in the reception room, turning over the ornaments on the tables with fingers curiously delicate for a man and of his profession. He had a tall, good-looking boy in attendance in midshipman's uniform, dirk and all complete, whom he presented as his stepson Josiah Nisbet, and to whom Lady Hamilton overflowed with cordiality. Boys were her delight, she protested. No, of course he should not live aboard. The poor little fellow (who blushed to be so named) must need a change after that cruel cruising for weeks and months! Sir William's Italian secretary should take him to see the sights, and she would talk with Captain Nelson.

Nisbet despatched, there was much to tell and hear. The long and weary blockade of Toulon.

"We got honour and salt beef, madam, not much else!" says he, leaning back on the fine silk of the settee as if a little wearied. "My good fellows have not had a morsel of fresh meat or vegetables for nineteen weeks and though I did my best to keep them amused and distracted, Your Ladyship will judge there was much sickness aboard. I have been luckier than some captains, but—"

"Hold! Not a word more."

Up goes a fair commanding hand, loaded with sparkling rings, and the other touches the silver bell at her elbow. The lacquey outside comes hurrying at the quick tinkle.

"Tell Ferrari to have six boatloads of fruit and vegetables sent off to the *Agamemnon* in my name. The best in the market. And let it be done *now*."

"Indeed, madam, words fail me to express my sense of

your consideration!" the young Captain cries with warmth. "Your Ladyship shows a sensibility I can never forget. The world that hankers for victories ignores the poor fellows that win it for them. I thank you in their name. That fruit will be the sweeter to them coming from our Ambassadress."

Indeed, it won his heart, which was at that time centred in his men. Never a commander more zealous for their good with all in his power. She touched the right string there.

"Indeed, sir, you have but to speak and have in Naples," says she earnestly. "If you could but guess the terror and agony of the Queen's mind with her sister in the hands of those French monsters, and Jacobinism rolling like the lava from Vesuvius ever nearer and nearer, you would comprehend your consequence here. Her only hope is England."

"You don't mention the King, madam?" says Nelson in some surprise.

"I don't mention him because he has not even the merit of being neutral to his wise Queen's English policy, but is forever angling after his brother on the throne of Spain, who is in the pay of the French Jacobins, so sure as I sit here."

"Then, Your Ladyship, was I amiss in mentioning first to the King my Admiral's need of troops? Good God, how is a plain sailor-man to see his way through such a maze! Surely the Ambassador would have checked me if I mistook."

"No, sir. It is true it would be well if the King could be dropped out of any negotiations, but being King 'tis not possible. I shall see Her Majesty this afternoon after the King and she have received you, and will lay before her any private particulars you may have reserved for Sir William. He will give you my character for good

sense and secrecy. Confer with him and let me know the result. And leaving you to this I will put on my hat and take your little Nisbet for a drive along the sea-road from Naples to Posilippo. I see him in the loggia. You can rely on my taking care of him."

Captain Nelson sat alone in the cool and beautiful room considering the events of the morning with that swift mind of his, and of these his beautiful hostess came last in interest. Could he have made a mistake in opening the Admiral's request for troops to the King? That was a vital matter for the Fleet and, not only that, but would affect his own professional reputation according to success or failure. But then, if so, Sir William should have given him a check somehow. He rose and took a turn about the room, considering, and touched the bell and with what many young captains would have considered consummate impudence requested he might have the honour of a few words with His Excellency before starting for the Royal audience. "Certainly," was the answer, "if Captain Nelson would kindly follow the messenger."

He rose at once, seeing Lady Hamilton through one of the windows, standing with Nisbet in the loggia. Her hand was on his shoulder, near as high as her own, and she was pointing to the sea, her face in the shadow of a great straw hat. He lingered an imperceptible moment, for the attitude, her womanly figure in its flowing white, and the sweet laughing face brought his home so tenderly and touchingly before him after the weary storm-tossed months before Toulon, the solitary years at sea, that his throat constricted and in his quick emotional way a moisture clouded his eyes. He saw his wife, his Fanny, fluttering her handkerchief as he drove off to join his ship at Portsmouth, his old father standing at her shoulder. For a moment, this stranger woman was Home to him, after all the sea loneliness.

What had he heard of her? He tried to remember, as he followed to Sir William's study. Of course the Fleet gossiped on all the Mediterranean doings when the captains assembled at one another's or the Admiral's table for business as much as for pleasure. He remembered Lord Hood's speaking of Sir William Hamilton.

"A gentleman, if ever there was one, grandson of the Duke of Hamilton, but should be attending to the Jacobins in Naples sooner than collecting old vases. A hobby well enough for a man in Pall Mall, but, by the Lord, sir, Naples is a perfect hotbed of vice; the very soil for the seeds of Jacobinism to fester in! The King of the Two Sicilies will be a broken reed to lean on when we come to close grips with the Mounseers."

And then one of the captains, laughing, "A man of taste other ways than in vases, my Lord. He married his mistress, the famous Mrs. Hart. They say he fell in love with her because there wasn't one of his ancient statues she could not represent with a white cloth about her."

And another: "I saw her in London, my Lord, at the opera when we were refitting at Portsmouth. A wonder—a regular blue-eyed English beauty. For my part, I can't blame His Excellency. 'Tis the only way to secure a mistress's fidelity."

And Lord Hood with his long, lean face, summing up: "Why, sir, 'tis the worst of all ways for a man for it gives a bad woman security to befool him. And I would have you all to warn your officers if duty should call them to Naples that it has the name of being a sink of iniquity—every woman a wanton" (but His Lordship used a Biblical term) "and every man a fiddler or a fool, and act accordingly in the giving of leave in the ward-room and gun-room. All the same, be she what she will, Lady Hamilton is Ambassadress and said to be as thick as thieves

with the Queen of Naples—a bird of the same feather if all tales be true. And now, gentlemen, to business!"

And then the thing passed from his mind like breath from a looking glass. He had no reason to expect a visit to Naples for himself. But, with the surrender of Toulon, it came, for the *Agamemnon* was a fast sailer and speed the essential. No thought of the story revived in him, thronged with great events and anxieties, until that moment.

Sir William was sitting at his bureau with a list before him which looked much more like a catalogue of *objets d'art* than a summary of the Neapolitan forces—but let that pass. Captain Nelson knew quite as little of the former as Sir William of the latter, and might be mistaken. He was as formal as his youth and subordination demanded.

"Your Excellency, I have made bold to ask a private word, for I understand we go to the Palace shortly."

"Certainly, sir. I was about to send for you. Her Excellency came in a moment since to say she had warned you that all real business is transacted with the Queen. I would have given you that hint this morning but 'twas impossible."

"I thank Your Excellency. But surely there could be no movement of troops without His Majesty's sanction?"

"Naturally, sir, but you shall understand in strict privacy that His Majesty is much under the influence of his brother, the King of Spain, who is in league with the French Jacobins. Consequently all news is obliged to go first, as it were, to the Queen and General Acton (a right-hand man of ours) who then do what they can with His Majesty."

Captain Nelson considered a swift instant. Thought might be seen quivering over his plain nervous face and in his keen eyes, so much were the inward and outward

man at one. He was got into the land of intrigue, for certain, and what was a sailor-man to do with it? No laying his ship broadside on to the King, and seeing his flag come slowly down the mast in answer to the guns. No cutlass out and boarding with women and their petty intrigues and tempers and secrets. Better be plain with the Ambassador at the start. He misliked his job.

"Your Excellency, I am no diplomatist, but a sailor. My errand is to get the troops for my Admiral, else the last state of Toulon will be the worst. What then is my shortest road to this end?"

Sir William took a pinch of snuff and surveyed the eager war-worn young man with good-humour.

"Sir, your shortest way is the Queen, and your shortest road to her through my Lady Hamilton."

"I guessed as much from Her Excellency's condescension but—"

"There is really no 'but,' Captain Nelson. I might have said it is the *only* way. The Queen herself will be anxious, even jealous, about despatching troops in the present state of Sicily. My Lady Hamilton, however, has unbounded influence with her and deserves it."

"Does Your Excellency convey that I am to discuss the matter with Her Ladyship?"

Captain Nelson looked grave, disturbed. For such counsels of war the Fleet was no training.

Sir William saw the look and smiled in his easy heart-hiding way.

"My dear sir, in diplomacy we fire no broadsides, we utter no defiances. We glide, insinuate, compliment, and thwart—all with delicacy. And you will thus find the ladies invaluable in my profession. Her Excellency, though I say it of my wife, has the brain and energy of a man; coupled with the finesse and patience of a woman. You and I will now go and pay our formal visit at the

Palace. If you follow my advice you will confine yourself to presenting the Admiral's letter with compliments alike to King and Queen—more especially the former. At two o'clock Her Ladyship will meet you with me, and if you will then be plain with us as to the situation of the Fleet, I will engage for it that she shall see the Queen. The matter of the transport of the troops you will arrange later with General Acton."

To say that Captain Nelson was astonished is to say little. Yet what to do but submit to the man on the spot—the British Ambassador? He bowed and signified obedience and the two set off, properly attended, amid the cheers of the crowding populace, for the news of Toulon had fled through the city, and rainbows of bunting were a-flutter from every stick and height.

The *Agamemnon* lay ringed about by the bringers of Her Excellency's bounty. He mentioned this with gratitude to Sir William.

"She has a passion for the glory of England, and therefore for the Fleet that is its instrument," says the Ambassador, "and an excellent heart behind it. I have seen her so worked up in these French horrors, and our action against them, that 'tis not too much to say I believe she would sell the gown off her back to provide for the meanest Jack ashore if he came to her."

It sank in, but on the whole Captain Nelson was occupied with his presentations to Royalty of the foreign order, and how best to carry himself in honour of the Flag. True he had a Royal friend of his own, His Royal Highness the Duke of Clarence, but he was a sailor like himself, a rough and tough take-it-or-leave-it Jack afloat—by no means a guide to Queens and their fripperies.

Yet she was not affrighting after all. The presentation to the pantaloon King was brief. He shook the Captain by the hand, introduced him himself to Acton, and com-

mended the Toulon work and the speed of the *Agamemnon* for the benefit of the quick-eyed Neapolitan grandees who stood about him. They affected Captain Nelson unpleasantly—grimacing, gesticulating foreigners. Was this the stuff the Admiral counted on for Toulon? Give him a thousand bull-headed big-lunged Norfolk men for choice to take his chance with, sooner than a million like these monkeys. And then the King himself conducted him to the Queen, with her ladies in waiting.

Here, too, he was unfavourably impressed. Handsome, no doubt, but lined, haggard, with too-bright eyes, worn to fiddle-strings with her political and private anxieties. He noted the fine diamonds about her throat and swinging beside her sallow cheeks—that brooch would buy half Norfolk. He must tell his Fanny these fine doings; she would like to hear. But her grimace was surface, he believed—what was in her shifty foreign heart?

The Austrian Hen, as her husband politely called her behind her elegant back, was formally gracious, no more. It was unfortunate that she could not express herself in English, and to use French, the language of the Ghouls, was impossible in present circumstances, not to mention that Captain Nelson's French was the last of his achievements. Therefore Sir William interpreted in mellifluous Italian.

"I congratulate our noble ally His Majesty the King of England and our fortunate selves on this great and auspicious victory!" said the Queen. "It may be hoped it will be a mortal blow to these scourges of humanity. And the King through me begs Captain Nelson to understand that no mark of gratitude will be lacking to him and to his gallant officers and men. A gala performance at San Carlo has to-day been ordered in their honour and a banquet will be given to-night by the King and myself to the distinguished Captain and officers—" and so forth—

Nelson bowing and bowing, and listening with all his ignorant ears to catch the word *troops*. When would the flummery stop and these people get to business?

She presented him with a snuff-box, a pretty sparkler enough, her own flattered face set in small brilliants; and so they got out into the cheering streets again.

"And now for food and Her Ladyship!" says the Ambassador.

All his life long, Nelson was to remember that charming meal in the large cool room with the assiduous lacqueys, and the splendours, for so they seemed to his simple taste, of silver and glass and delicious foods most delicately served; for Sir William, like Greville and all his clan, would have things handsome about him, and Emma was something of a Sybarite. Almost it seemed a dream and that he must awake to the tumbling of billows outside, the grey leagues of sea, and the swaying tables galleried to catch the sliding china. It was a family party, himself and Nisbet the only guests, and Nisbet sat beside the lovely lady in white and looked up to her in a kind of cubbish awe, for already Nelson had had reason to note that Josiah lacked manners. Beautiful indeed, he thought, but even less so in features, could that be possible, than in expression. Life, eagerness, quick-thoughted graciousness, all sparkled in her face and winged every swift gesture. Nothing could be done by halves. She heaped Nisbet's plate with *dolci*—"Boys worth their weight in mud like a good tuck-in with sweets!" says she, laughing kindly. "Don't I love them myself too?"

And then Josiah must needs have two plates of fruit overflowed with cream by the same fair hand, and two glasses of Sir William's champagne, and then another, till his very eyes bulged and Nelson put out a restraining hand. It was the same with himself. All her best she gave and only grieved it was not more. Never so cordial

a welcome! It was like a cheering Christmas fire, spreading its warmth and gladding flame through the great Norfolk manor-houses at home. It dimmed the languid Neapolitan sunshine.

But all this despatched, and the three of them closeted in Sir William's study, what a different woman she became! Indeed, she bewildered him with the changeableness of her. It was a grave earnest face beside Sir William's, he himself facing the pair.

Sir William briefly recounted the events of the morning and invited her opinion of the Queen's action.

"You, my love, know her as none else."

Indeed, Nelson thought it the strangest council at which he had ever assisted—a tale for the Admiral when he got back.

"Why, she will fear the troops going, no doubt of that. She is one that likes to hold the power in her own hand; and the King will of course be averse, because he has a notion, which God knows he has no brains to carry out, to assist the Spanish interest some day with them. He would be well with England and with France too and balance betwixt them like a merry-andrew. The Queen must be convinced and then 'tis done. Will Captain Nelson allow us to see his private instructions from the Admiral?"

Thus this astonishing young woman. It all but petrified him. He hesitated coldly.

"Madam, I can mean no discourtesy, but they are for the eye of the *Ambassador*."

"And the Ambassador," replies Sir William gravely, "can do nothing with the Queen but through the Ambassadress. You must find Her Ladyship in arguments, Captain Nelson, though she has plenty of her own."

He obeyed on Sir William's assurance and the bright quick eye of the lady. She appeared to master all he

said with precision, wasted not a moment, rehearsed his points, and rising, looked at the watch at her girdle and prepared to depart for her fixed audience with the Queen.

"It takes the form of a friendly visit with talk and refreshments," says she, "but I shall bring back news for all that. Will you not take Captain Nelson for a drive, Sir William? The more the people see and applaud him the better for our ends."

She left the room, with his astonished eyes following her.

"Her Ladyship is the key of the situation in Naples," says Sir William easily. "Shall we drive?"

They found her waiting in the reception room when they returned, entertaining a party of the Agamemnons with the most delicious singing, not a care on her bright brow as she warbled. She enticed the first lieutenant into attempting a duo with her, and the astonished Nelson, who had never heard his voice uplifted but in an order or to outshout the storm, discovered that he possessed a tenor of excellence in his third in command. Lord, how she drew them out! The young men were standing about her, talking, laughing, telling Her Ladyship confidentially of adventures Nelson had never heard of though he kept his subordinates at no awful distance and believed he knew their hearts.

"And since I am certain you are all in rags after this long cruising, for what are men's fingers!" says she with a fine scorn, "I insist that all you gentlemen send your wardrobes ashore and I and my women will send you back refitted—is not that the sea word?—to the Admiral. We won't beat the French with a ragged regiment, so we won't!"

They thanked her cordially—who could refuse such a warm heart? She constituted herself their she-admiral and commanded that the little sick midshipman Bowen

should be sent ashore for her own and her mother's nursing—for good Mrs. Cadogan was enthroned on a settee in purple and fine linen, listening to the Ambassadress's sallies. And then, when she had them all laughing and talking, she glided up against Captain Nelson with lowered secret eyes.

"'Tis all right about the troops. The thing is done. Acton will call to-night on the King's behalf and offer you six thousand. And now, dismiss care, and hail pleasure and a much needed rest!"

Sir William told him later that she had conquered the Queen completely, had had Acton in, and between them the three concerted the measures and convinced the King he dare no more offend Great Britain than spit in the face of the Pope.

"A wonderful woman!" said Nelson, musing.

And Sir William: "You say very right, sir."

But her wonders grew on him during that week of sore-needed rest. The beauty of her, the kindness, the flaming womanly one-sided, one-ideal patriotism that could see never a share of so much as grey in a foe's midnight blackness. He had thought himself keen against the French, but—Lord save us!—my lady was burning ahead while he laboured after. So he thought, but the truth was he kindled her as much as she him. Sir William was old and cool-blooded. He had seen these national feuds come and go and knew a people might be your deadly enemy to-day, and the sword in your hand to-morrow. Not so, these two. It was God's cause as well as man's they plotted and worked in, and black was black and white was white and a Frenchman the devil, and an Englishman, especially a sailor, St. Michael and St. George sent for his ruin. They talked the night out and the day in on this, and the Agamemnons hailed her as the Patroness of the Navy—a name she was to earn more greatly in days to come.

Furthermore, he had Romney's taste for her sweetness. She would talk with lowered voice of his old father, and the wife who must suffer such agonies and he at sea in storms of shot and shell. He caught himself describing his Fanny; her quiet grace—"Not beautiful like you, your Ladyship, but restful to a tossed-about sailor, like the twilight settling down over the Norfolk Broads. I could wish you knew her—a good woman."

How could he know that Emma's gentle acquiescent sigh was modelled on her dear dead Duchess—studied from the life of her gracious sympathy? For him it was all nature. Indeed it was—at the moment.

And so the week went by in triumph almost as wearying as toils, but for the quiet hour he got with her now and again and those twilight talks. She warmed Sir William into cordiality also. He knew well enough what the Fleet must mean to the world now and onward, and liked this worn young sailor with his lined face and sensitive mouth. And so the troops were embarked and the last day came, and my lady had played her part gallantly.

It was the 24th September, and in the cloudless heat the *Agamemnon* had sloped awnings for a gala of her own to return the plenteous royal hospitalities. She lay swinging at her anchor, formidable but good-humoured, a drowsy giant rocking on blue waters of peace. All the gay folk were bidden for luncheon aboard and the lovely Ambassadress would do the honours of His Britannic Majesty's ship. The flags were flying in rainbow strings, the guns dispossessed—security and gaiety fluttered in the light voices from the ports, and all were waiting the royalties, Emma beside the Captain.

Good God! Word from the Prime Minister! For Nelson! What, what had happened! The crowding, the silence to hear, and the boatswain just piping the King up the side!

A French man of war with three attendant vessels off Sardinia. *Agamemnon* to give chase!

Away with the guests, the awnings, the King, the Ambassador, the frippery!

The giant is awake—awake in earnest. The pipe whistled another tune indeed.

Like frightened birds the guests dispersed, boats crowding about to receive their huddling fineries. Down with the awnings—away with every sign of peace. It is war.

The Captain is at his post, but steps aside for one word with the departing Ambassador and his lady.

"A thousand, thousand thanks, my dear friends. What words have I for so much goodness? None, none! But I will return some day with trophies that pay you in the only way to stir your patriotic hearts. Good-bye, your dear Ladyship, you have bound me to the service of your Queen. You have served our country indeed and the Admiral shall know to whom he owes it."

Hands are wrung. She looks in his face with her own peculiar glow.

"I would give this hand to be sailing with you if but as a powder-monkey, to fight these devils! I envy you—I envy you, Captain!"

The white teeth grit on the words. She means them. What a woman! he thinks, with a last wave of his hand as he sees her kiss young Nisbet and promise to write of him to his mother. Yes, her kindly heart forgets nothing—nothing!

But good-bye to the image of her, he has other thoughts and cares. The great anchor is hauled up from depths where the Roman galleys have anchored, the Greek triremes. Slowly it comes to the catheads, dripping its diamonds. Slowly the sails fill to a soft breeze—would to God it were a gale!—and the *Agamemnon*, awake and wary, glides along the bay, saluting the royalty of the

Two Sicilies with the finality of her sea courtesies as she goes and sinks at last, a sea-wraith faint and far into the distance.

Emma goes back to the room of the mirrors, almost collapsed with evaporated excitement. She has strung herself high these days and pays for it now in a kind of nervous exhaustion.

But she and the Queen agree that Captain Nelson is a fit representative of England's sea honour. They hope if need be that he may be the messenger again, Sir William nodding assent, as he goes quietly back to his vases.

And Nelson writes to his calm sweet wife in the Norfolk parsonage that in her is all his joy, none separated from her. And she, his other self, must hear of the Neapolitan glories. And the astonishing ambassadress is not forgotten.

"Lady Hamilton has been wonderfully good and kind to Josiah. She is a young woman of amiable manners and who does honour to the station to which she is raised."

He paused as he wrote it, reflecting how little that cool sentence conveyed all the emotions through which she had drawn him. But what matter? They might never meet again.

A true courageous Englishwoman. That was his last thought. But Fanny represented better the passive sweetness of ideal wifehood.

The ship ploughed through moonlit seas, with a faint star or two over sleeping Naples.

CHAPTER XIX

DIPLOMACY

A TROUBLOUS year, but it brought a new part to Emma. Nelson had carried back to Lord Hood an account of the excellent dispositions of the Ambassadress toward the Fleet; the junior officers were full of her praises also. They had a friend at court in the truest sense of the word, and that grim Fleet, tossing about the Mediterranean in storm and sunshine, harassing the French in their every plan, seldom seeing land save as a danger, had need of many things; the officers were certain now that what she could do in their favour she would.

Nelson, who wrote often and warmly to the Hamiltons, though never nearer to them than Leghorn, had passed the knowledge of her warm heart and indefatigable spirit on to Sir John Jervis, now his commander in chief, and urged him to write to the English Embassy for all he needed for his bluejackets.

They were assailing Corsica now—that stronghold of French power in the Mediterranean—and their needs, in the cruel distance from England, were insistent. It seemed absurd to suppose a woman could help them, yet Nelson, his right hand, thought it worth the trial, and Sir John Jervis wrote, full of apologies and suppressed eagerness, direct to the lady herself. Letters to the Ambassador were certainly supervised in the King's interest. To her they would be empty compliment and pass safely enough. It may give some notion of their straits if we glimpse into Nelson's letter to my Lord Hood, a little before.

"We are really without firing, wine, beef, pork, flour, and almost without water. Not a rope, canvas, nail or twine in the ship. The ship is so light she cannot hold her side to the wind. We are certainly in a bad plight at present."

And yet with all these shortcomings, the stronghold of Corsica, Bastia, must be attacked—the more desperately needful because Toulon was again in French hands through the machinations of a little Corsican artillery officer to be known in future as Buonaparte. Strange that two such stars as Nelson and Buonaparte should rush so swiftly to the same zenith in the same years.

Often enough Nelson wished, pacing the quarterdeck in those days, that he could see, instead of the highlands of Corsica, Uovo and Nuovo rounding softly from blue seas, and hear the ringing cordial welcome of the Lady of the Embassy.

"She's more man than any of them," he brooded. "I warrant we should not lack for stores if *she* had her word in it!"

He remembered the promptitude that had supplied the troops for Toulon. She seemed a fair guardian spirit, but alas, too far away. He would have liked her sympathy also in all his new honours, bought by the loss of an eye—yet not too dearly.

Still, he wrote; Sir John Jervis wrote; and she responded eagerly. Ships came tossing down to Corsica, safeguarded by English frigates, loaded gunwale deep with necessities. She bought with extraordinary acumen. One would say she had a seaman's instinct. They had but to hint and it was done. Amazing part for Emma of Edgware Row! She spent her own money when the Queen's ran short. The two women had a Neapolitan agent secret as death, who bought for them, chartered the little coasting vessels, and while the two played cards

and laughed at the ceremonious Courts and the idle Neapolitan women, sent their bounty Corsica-way and made his own comfortable commission. It was exceedingly well managed.

As for Nelson, beef and pork, rope and flour, were more to him than diamonds to a court beauty, and in his soul he loved her with a generous comrade-love for the help she gave them. Never a light story of her in the Fleet now, if he were present.

"That woman," he would cry, his face flashing with energy, "is an honour to the name of Englishwoman. She has the Fleet on her heart night and day, and the wit of a man to carry out the needful. Here's a health to the Patroness of the Fleet!"

And they would drink it standing, in the wine of the country she sent them and with the "Hip, hip, hurra!" Nelson had taught her at Naples.

Her help, any help, was urgent, for that year darkened down from the high hopes of Toulon into grave alarms. The French developed a force more terrible than any discovery of gun or bomb—a man, Napoleon, with all his mighty brain turned upon the destruction of England, and all his devastating energy centred on the means to be adopted—and excepting Nelson, it may well be that there was no Englishman of the day who realized that the Mediterranean was the keystone of the bridge over which he must pass either to world dominion or to ruin.

For Emma, it possessed her. Forgotten were all the Attitudes, the gaieties, the little schemes for pomp and pleasure. She lived but for news of the Fleet; a letter to Sir William from Nelson, or a less guarded one to herself, since that was the safer channel, made up her day's excitement, and her interviews with the Queen her daily bread. Excitement had always been her native atmosphere. It wearied and aged Sir William; she throve

luxuriant. As to the Queen, she could not do without her. Emma was her "chère amie," "Emma carissima," and her warmth was repaid in kind.

"My charming Queen!" she wrote to Greville. "Everything one can wish, the best mother, wife, and friend in the world. I live constantly with her and have done so intimately for two years, and if you hear any lyes about her, contradict them, and if you should see a cursed book written by a vile French dog with her character in it, don't believe one word. No person can be as charming as the Queen. If I was her daughter she could not be kinder to me and I love her as my own soul."

That was Emma all over—the passionate partisanship which saw nothing but divinity in a friend, nothing but devilry in a foe. And if with all this, there mingled a little feudal romance in favour of the daughter, mother and wife of sovereigns, can the child of the people, herself all romance, be blamed very severely?

Sir William overflowed with these praises in private and, smiling a little at certain reminiscences of his own, would beseech Emma to believe the Queen a little lower than the angels, and besought in vain, and then reflecting philosophically that this was at all events a driving force which spared him much trouble and probably would do more good than harm, betook himself to his vases and gems once more. Emma could have trounced him sometimes but for her affection. His coolness almost drove her mad. But she nursed him tenderly through an anxious illness, and that more than once.

And things grew steadily worse. Napoleon was proving himself statesman as well as warrior, and a terrible fear gained ground that the mean-minded King of Spain would finally throw in his lot with the French Jacobins.

He had excuse for all about him the coalition of kings was breaking up and dissolving into the republics of a

day. Austria trembled, Prussia fell off; even the steadfast England wavered.

There was a rumour of orders to evacuate the Mediterranean which caused the Queen and Emma to look at each other in silent despair. If *that* order were fulfilled, alas for the Two Sicilies! The Little Englanders of the day were slowly dominating the home situation and Nelson, chafing in the Mediterranean, wrote:

"Till this minute it has been usual for the allies of England to fall from her, but till now she never was known to desert her friends whilst she had the power of supporting them."

And Buonaparte stormed Italy. Northern Italy lay at his feet, conquered, bound, plundered of her ancient glories of statues, pictures, the jewels that most adorned her, and he returned to the Directory in France the most famous general of modern times. They talked of Cæsar, Hannibal, cast in the shade for ever. And so the years went by.

But Spain? Spain was the cruellest anxiety for England—Spain with her harbours, her throne at the Gut of the Mediterranean, her fleet. If she could but know the true intentions of Spain! But how? There the English Cabinet was baffled.

The Queen of the Two Sicilies and Emma had met for an afternoon's singing. Her Majesty was fond to passion of music, and the Ambassadress's singing was not "reasonable good" for a great lady, but famous throughout Europe. Who could deny a harassed queen her daily refreshment of sweet song, with talk and refreshments to follow? Princess Belmonte, wife of the Neapolitan Ambassador to the Court of Spain, was with them that day, and full of charming chatter of the Spanish Court, His Neapolitan Majesty's gracious brother, the King; and so forth; and the Queen, Emma seconding, led her out be-

yond the caution of an ambassadress in case some grains of information could be picked up.

But the lady, though open as a *costume de bal*, was also guarded with steel and buckram beneath. She favoured them with such gossip as please ladies, no more, and when she spoke to a lady in waiting at the window, the Queen's burning eye caught Emma's.

"Would you not sing for us, chère Miladi? The Princess has not heard you of late. (She has brought a letter for the King!) I beseech you to favour us. (My spies know of a cipher letter.) If I might choose it should be the 'Guardami.' "

"Madam, can I refuse Your Majesty anything? I am scarcely in voice to-day. I have been sitting up all night with my husband, who is extremely unwell. (Will the King show it to Acton?) but if it please you! Would you not prefer the 'Stella mia'?"

"Oh, madam, what you please. (Certainly he will not. Only the Foreign Minister will know.) Then may I beg it now?"

Emma sent for her music, so tremulous that she doubted if she could sing at all. If this was as the Queen suspected, Spain had succumbed to the successes of Napoleon and—what would Nelson, what would all her friends of the Fleet say? She felt it in her to take this laughing young woman by the throat and drag the paper from her bosom. Instead of which the accompanist opened the music, and she sang with her thoughts far otherwhere, but with more brilliancy than usual if with less feeling.

Compliments, smiles, from the Princess Belmonte, and the other ladies; gracious approval from the Queen; Emma's sweeping obeisance at the door. She trails down the long corridor, and enters her carriage, marvelling what will be the next turn of this strange wheel.

A ragged urchin with impish smile and the long agate eyes of the south offers a bouquet at the window.

"Buy it, Excellency. Buy it, O loveliest. Flowers, flowers, plucked this morning with the dew on them. O Lady, I have eaten nothing to-day. For the pity of the Virgin and Saint Anna, buy, I beseech you."

Emma's heart was never inaccessible to pity and she had long outsoared the Greville limit of a farthing. Ambassadresses must give generously. She pushed a large silver coin into the olive paw, and let the flowers fall carelessly on her lap.

The Princess, the letter—the Queen would not have said that without knowing! That, too, was why she had not been asked to delay after the others. The Queen would risk no suspicion of plotting at this point. Clear as noonday, but then, how could they meet? She moved impatiently, and the bouquet rolled from her lap to the floor and a little grimy paper folded like a quill fell out of it.

English—then Acton was at the back of this also! She read eagerly.

"It is here, but I know not how to obtain it. Suggest."

That was all, but Emma's quick wits raced swift as thought. She was in the Queen's skin. What would she herself do provided Sir William had a secret she wished to master? If the King were so great a fool as to plot behind the Queen's and Acton's backs and ruin his country in so doing, what terms could be kept with him? She had her plan clear as noonday in five minutes. If the Queen had her courage it was done. But had she?

She put her head out of the window and ordered her carriage to return to the Palace, and unfastening her glove, took off a small diamond ring, and clasped it in a shut hand with the flowers. It was not long before she was curtseying at the door of the Royal salon again, all smiles and apologies.

"Oh, madam, my carelessness! Will Your Majesty pardon? I have dropped a little ring, not of much value, but to me invaluable as His Excellency's gift. Have I your permission to search?"

The Queen's eye had caught the flowers. She was all graciousness. She moved her Royal skirts aside, the other ladies hovered about the floor looking for the sparkle under chairs, in the corner, Emma hunting with the best of them.

Triumph! A little cry! She held it up, laughing. "Under the pedal of the forte-piano. Why hadn't I the sense to look there at first? Ladies, with Her Majesty's permission, I must tell you the story of that ring."

Permission charmingly given, all the ladies a-tiptoe to hear, the Princess Belmonte fanning herself prettily behind the Queen's chair.

"Your Majesty, His Excellency had promised me a ring if I studied my solfeggi as I ought. I laboured for hours daily. The ring was bought—I knew that—but I was not to see it until my birthday. And then a terrible thing happened. In arranging the flowers I knocked down his famous Pompeian figurino and broke it!"

Dramatic pause. Cries of sympathy and horror from the ladies. Her Majesty laughing at Emma's tragic face.

"My good husband was furious. My birthday should not be kept. I should have no ring. Was it fair, Your Majesty, Ladies? I decided it was not."

"No, not fair!" they chorused. "A bargain is a bargain!"

"So I thought. And the night before my birthday, while my husband slept I turned out his pockets! Ladies, behold a brigand! I found the case. I put on the ring, and in the morning I wished myself many happy returns in his presence and flourished the ring in his face!"

Loud applause. Cries of "Were you forgiven?"

"Ladies, need you ask? What husband does not forgive his wife if she plays her game rightly? Next day he asked *my* forgiveness. But the ring is useful as a reminder."

She asked a thousand pardons of Her Majesty and made her gay curtsey and went off again, and kneeling close, with her mouth at his ear, told the story, trembling, to Sir William. He approved warmly.

"Splendid—done as it was on the spur of the moment! She will get that paper to-night if it exists. Oh, Emma, I am but a burden on you, ill and in pain as I am, and this may be vital."

"I can manage it," she said, and fell into deepest thought.

It was next evening towards dusk that a boy with a basket of flowers approached her again, leaning against the balustrade of the garden and humming a song of the people to himself in a sweet low murmur.

"Flowers, Excellenza, flowers. For the pity of God!" She bought at once. That was no novelty. The Neapolitans knew that the Lady of the Embassy rejected no appeal for mercy. She flew to her own room. A paper in cipher, with no covering letter. A great glow overspread her face. Her knees knocked together, so that she could scarcely make her way to Hamilton's room, where he sat, his foot swathed up against the gout; old, ill, querulous.

But all that dropped aside as he saw the cipher. He said, "This may be of the very first importance. We must do it alone."

She touched the bell quietly, trembling with eagerness, and listened while he gave his order for the Embassy ciphers to Trevylyan, the young secretary chosen for him by the Hamilton interest. Not even he must see the result. Patiently they sat up half the night decoding the

brief letter, for brief it mercifully was. Spain was definitely to leave the Alliance and cast in her lot with France. In future the French and Spanish fleets would sail together.

It was reciphered into the English cipher, and Emma put the original in her bosom. By heaven's own luck the courier was, in any case, to start that night with despatches, and it was nothing to include this among them.

Sir William signed it; she sealed and despatched it. He looked her in the face when it was done.

"Emma, my love, you have deserved well of your country. The party at home for evacuating the Mediterranean will look small enough when this is known. Now set your bright wits to work to restore the original to the Queen. I will write myself to King George."

He did so with the proud realization that Emma, could all the story be told, had become a trustworthy and successful diplomatic agent. It could not be told in fulness, for the Queen's name must be hidden. But from his heart he admired Emma's coolness and address. She visited the Palace next day with drawings by Gavin Hamilton of the Villa Favourita, the Queen's favourite summer villa, and it was easy in the give and take of papers to pass the cipher. The King never knew he had been robbed, but the English Cabinet made use of its knowledge.

There was no more talk of evacuating the Mediterranean, and the bond between the two women was strong as steel. The whole episode advanced Sir William at home. He grew daily in importance.

Her life became one of passionate interest. She corresponded not infrequently with Nelson, for that again might pass as friendship. The secrets for co-operation of the French and Spanish fleets filtered amazingly to England, and back to the English Admirals, and none could lay their finger on the source. King Ferdinand

could scarcely suspect the Queen for he kept her in utter ignorance. And Emma—Emma was the soul of the whole conspiracy, the invaluable servant of England, of her Queen, and her husband.

Well might she say, "My position in this Court is now very extraordinary"—there was little vanity in that statement. My Lady Hamilton was a prima donna in earnest. And her stage was Europe.

And the years darkened slowly down, as the rising comet of Napoleon swept into the established systems, dragging half the heavens in his train.

The English Fleet, most absolutely for the whole world, for its last hope of freedom, all, all depended on those silent admirals, those wearied captains at watch in the Mediterranean. Since the visit of the *Agamemnon* Emma had never seen Nelson, yet she had not forgotten him, nor the sense of something dynamic, unforeseeable, with which he had inspired her. He was hawking all over the Mediterranean since Corsica was taken. He had lost an eye. He had lost an arm. He was Sir Horatio now. Items reached her, but little more. And the thought haunted her that her work was what he would applaud if he could know it. She was Patroness of the Navy to some purpose, if she could only boast herself as she dared not.

The Two Sicilies were forced to a hateful compact with France. They dared not break it; if they did, the kingdom, trembling to a republic under French domination, must fall.

Oh, for an English Fleet! That was the prayer of Emma and of Marie Caroline day by day. They appealed to Sir John Jervis, now Lord St. Vincent, commanding in the Mediterranean, for help, help, at any cost.

And then a great, a terrible portent broke upon the world, holding its breath in terror. Napoleon, not yet

thirty years old, who had been making great and secret preparations, had launched a mighty expedition on Egypt, resolving to catch England by the throat where she might be easiest strangled and shaken from her domination in India. Nelson knew, the world knew, of preparations at Toulon, but not a soul where the blow would fall until the fox had slipped cover and it was too late. He was doubling down the Mediterranean eastward, confusing the scent by every means in his power. And Nelson was pursuing him, hampered by misinformation, by the lack of frigates, scouts of the Fleet, but steadfastly pursuing.

And on that pursuit the fate of Europe hung. It is easy even now to picture the fever of hope and fear in Naples and in Sir William's and Emma's hearts. They knew, none better, that the British Fleet would need the sinews of war, food and water. Ships, like armies, fight on their bellies. But yet the compact with the French hindered the necessary aid from the Sicilian King. Further, it forbade the Sicilian kingdom to receive at any time more than four frigates at once into any of the King's harbours.

Napoleon was taking no risks. He had burned the prairie behind him.

True, Nelson had his secret instructions to seize food and water by force of arms if no better could be, but that was doubtful, was an insult to the Sicilian King, and therefore playing into Napoleon's hands, and must be his last and dangerous resort.

But what was to be done? Food and water refused, Gibraltar, far off Gibraltar at the mouth of the Mediterranean, was Nelson's nearest port of help, and with that throwing back on his trail Egypt lay free before Napoleon.

Nelson had been in frequent correspondence with the

Hamiltons though he had never seen them since the *Agamemnon* up-anchored in the Bay of Naples. His mind reverted often to his friend Emma; for friend every officer in that ship had felt her to be, and Nelson most of all. But still more it hovered about her influence with the Queen. That Ferdinand in his purblind folly had been playing fast and loose with France and Spain, all knew. But the Queen? She at all events had the wit to defend her dynasty by truth to England. Or so he believed. Could she be trusted?

He wrote to Emma, interweaving his stern meaning with compliments, allusions to the charming Queen and so forth, and waited for her answer eagerly. She would understand—trust her for knowing what her country needed!

Her answer returned. The Queen was staunch. Her own influence with her had grown and strengthened. What could she do to help? Let him but be frank and he would find her with Sir William at his back. He kissed that letter, not for love's sake, not a breath of it, unless the true flash from comrade to comrade be called love—as indeed it should until we find as many words as the Greeks for that most under-labelled passion.

From that moment his mind was steadfastly made up for Naples, though to no one but his commander in chief did he break his secret.

It was a lovely day in June, the water calm as a blue pearl, when Hamilton, in the room of the mirrors with Emma writing to his dictation at his elbow, sighted fore-running ships coming up from the westward to Ischia and so on to Capri. He started up. The pen fell from her hand and they stood together at the window fixed in suspense.

"Good God!" said she at last. "What will the King say? He leans on Austria now that Spain has broken

under him. This is St. Vincent's doing—but sure he knows the ships are forbid to enter."

For, recognized almost publicly now as the Patroness of the Fleet, Admiral Lord St. Vincent had written to her that much depended on her communications with him. She warmed even the cool St. Vincent with her fire, as she did all who came near her.

"The picture you draw of the lovely Queen of Naples and the Royal Family would rouse the indignation of the most unfeeling. I am bound by my oath of chivalry to protect all who are persecuted and distressed."

Sir William had laughed a little over that letter. It would have been long indeed before St. Vincent would have unbent to write it to him. Well, if women imported the element of romance into diplomacy, and it stirred men into action, so much the better. He was proud of his Emma.

"It's St. Vincent's doing!" she repeated, leaning on Hamilton's arm. "Now who will be in command? I wish it might be Nelson."

"My love," replied Sir William sententiously, "such is your luck that I believe it will be whoever you have set your heart on. And, if it is not, that a frigate despatched by you to St. Vincent will bring your choice instantly. See—only two vessels are making into the bay. The bulk of the fleet is evidently to lie off Capri. Don't I see boats lowering? Come down."

They waited below and before an hour was over two post captains, brushed up and strictly on service, demanded a conference with the Ambassador—Captains Troubridge and Hardy, right-hand men of Admiral Nelson's as the Embassy pair knew full well.

"Sir Horatio in command?" was Hamilton's first question.

"Certainly." Lord Hood had detached him to ask food

and water for his own squadron in chase of the French. That was their errand. The Admiral would not land, for time pressed. What could be done with the Royalties? Emma was not present ostensibly. She did not know these men. But, by Sir William's desire, she was stationed in the deep alcove where she could hear every word. It might well be vital she should.

The old difficulty, he told them. The King opposed, dallying weakly with Austria's uncertain aid and hoping to keep well with France. The Queen, all British in sympathy, eager to help, and alas! the Fleet suspended between these two irreconcilables.

"What use to ask the King?" said Hamilton. "He will shift, temporise, play to gain time. Gentlemen, I regret to say it, but I have tried every avenue already to break that most infamous pact forbidding our ships to enter Sicilian ports freely. There is unfortunately a French busybody here, a regicide named Garat, a born spy, and everything that takes place is magnified out of all knowledge and packed off straight to France. Still, I can only suggest application to the King."

An anxious wrinkle formed itself on Troubridge's forehead: "But that will mean endless delay and the French may be anywhere. They will spin it out and time is diamonds. No other hope?"

"None, sir, I regret to say. You must have a ministerial order for food and water."

"Again that means delay," said Hardy at Troubridge's shoulder, shifting nervously from one foot to the other. His face showed that suspense galled him cruelly. "Not only so, your Excellency, but we need frigates like water in the desert. We are frigate-starved. We meant to ask for the Sicilian frigates."

"They'll never do that," Sir William said decidedly. "Put it out of your head, my good sir. It would be an

act of war on France. Leave it to me, and I'll do what I can to get you a Royal order for victualling and water."

The captains stood there dogged and disconsolate. Bad news to take back to Nelson and he fuming and raging as it was. Emma marked all from her retirement. Sir William left the room to make himself ready and still the two men waited there, not exchanging a word, evidently on tenterhooks.

Presently back came the Ambassador, and away they went. She could hear the carriage rolling down the street. She slipped from her hiding place and stood a minute to think, then flew upstairs, light as the Emma of Up Park, and into the stately plumed hat and long silk cloak, and ordered her own carriage. The Queen should know the rights of this business. It was two o'clock when the men got back from the audience and Troubridge carried a paper in his hand and a frowning dissatisfied face above it. A ministerial order written under the King's eye, hedged with conditions, barbed with restrictions, to the governors of the Sicilian ports, permitting the wounded to be taken ashore, and victualling and water to be accorded under certain circumstances, in case of need.

"And I'm a Dutchman," said Hamilton, flinging himself exhausted into a chair, "if you get anything out of that damned order. For why? Isn't it obvious it can be twisted any way, and, if convenient, the King can send a hint to throw every damned difficulty in your way?"

Troubridge also swore quietly as he sat and looked at the paper. It was better than nothing and that was all. A diplomatic shift to fob them off and please the French. Indeed, it might prove worse than nothing and a mere loss of time. The two sat silent, thinking dangerous thoughts. If it came to forcing the Sicilian King, as it very well might, why, then—neither of them cared to consider the consequences.

And as they sat, her Excellency entered, still plumed and cloaked, pale with some feeling she did not disclose, but greeting them warmly and kindly.

"Sir William, I would give much to see our old friend the Admiral before he puts to sea. Would there be any objection on the part of these officers if we ordered our own yacht and went back with them to Capua?"

Her eye warned him; he was cordial at once. "Why, certainly, it would be a pleasure to see Sir Horatio and I might well be able to give him some hints that would be useful with the governors whom I know. Would a lady be in the way, Captain Troubridge? And how is the wind?"

"Fair." No difficulty about that, but every moment was precious. Could her Excellency hasten?

"I am ready now," said Emma. "Let us go."

She spoke scarcely a word while the swift yacht cut the water to Capri but sat, wrapped, as it were, in her own thoughts. The two captains had so much to discuss with Sir William that they were well content that it should be so. It was no time for small talk with even the most charming of women. What Nelson would say to bringing her aboard they could not tell. Sir William must answer for that.

It was dusk when they boarded the *Vanguard*, her riding light lit, and her huge bulk dim and mysterious in the twilight. Blue Peter already flying, the yacht had, of course, been sighted and Nelson was at the gangway, eager to see the Ambassador, who might have news of the first consequence, and unconscious of the slight figure that crouched abaft. He started back in surprise when he saw her. Only the rope ladder for the men was available but he had a chair rigged up instantly and had her hoisted on deck. She stood there silent for a minute and motioned to her husband.

"I have a word for you, Admiral," he said easily, "and her Excellency wished to bid you Godspeed on your errand. Can we be private?"

Without a word, Nelson led the way to his cabin. His mind was so pressed with anxieties that his only thought was of the result of Troubridge's errand ashore.

"Have they got the order?" he asked.

"After a fashion, yes. But I fear not one that will serve your purpose, sir," said Hamilton. "You know the King of old, and this time he shelters himself behind his Minister. We must hope for the best, unless indeed—"

He looked at Emma. His hope was that the Queen might have sent some offer to deal with the King. Her silence promised, not fulfilment, but possibility.

"Sir Horatio, I rejoice to see you," said the soft fluty notes he remembered so well. "And how is Josiah?"

He made some hurried answer, and looked at Sir William. What were they there for?

"I want you to look at this paper," she said, her voice shaking. "'Tis known to my husband, if not to you, that the Queen, in virtue of having brought an heir to the throne, has the right to a seat on the Council and a voice in all decisions. I urged Her Majesty but now to use her power. She feared to do so for fear of complications, not only with the King, but with the French. I urged her on my knees and with tears for the sake of all her hopes, her kingdom, her children—" Her voice broke with excitement and the throbbing of her heart. Nelson's face fixed on her, though as yet he could not comprehend. He was white as death. If he must return to Gibraltar for victualling, good-bye to the French and all his hopes. His thin hand shook on the table. Sir William took a paper from her hand and read it to himself, while the two looked at each other in silence.

"Sir," he said, extending it, "I offer you from my Lady Hamilton a Royal order for provisioning and watering the Fleet where you will" He spoke with the rigid composure of his caste and rank. Emma, near breaking down, all sparkling, glowing, trembling at last, stared at Nelson. He mastered himself by an effort that for a minute seemed beyond him and took the paper and read it. Then laid it on the table and stood as if before his King.

"Madam," he said with solemnity, "you have saved your country. God send the Fleet may be worthy of your courage and wisdom."

She sank into the chair behind her and covered her face with her hands, while he went to the door and gave the order to make sail instantly.

CHAPTER XX

THE NILE

As Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson sailed for Syracuse, many thoughts kept him company in striding up and down his quarterdeck. He loved his wife with a calm affection which recognized to the full her tender claim upon him, her duty, devotion and wifely submission. To him, his Fanny appeared the ideal wife. One classified women only as good and bad. The first were those who were obedient to all household duties and created the soft and infinitely restful home atmosphere to which a wearied man returned from his labours for rest and refreshment infinitely soothing after the harsh contact with men and affairs. Here one could unburden one's soul of likes and dislikes, hopes and fears, and be certain of a kind inevitable echo to all. What he thought, his Fanny would think. Her small pleasures and angers would follow his as certainly as little pet dogs running at his heels. She had never stood in the way of any of his duties though undoubtedly she felt the long separations. She wept a few gentle tears on parting and applied herself wholly to the care of the person he loved best in the world next to herself, his old father. Those two represented home to him and often in the mirages of the tossing spray he beheld that little room in the Norfolk parsonage, and his father's big winged chair drawn up beside the fire, and Fanny reading the last long letter to him in her mild monotone, and the serene pride of the two in his achievements. Poor little Fanny, she had had many anxieties with her husband and son in the same danger, and yet never said a word

to hinder him—no, not one. Stop!—when he had got his flag and the Cross of the Bath after the glorious battle of St. Vincent she had tenderly implored him henceforward to leave boarding to captains. Dear little Fanny! —he smiled over that bit of pride in the new Admiral's lady. knew too how much it summed up of past suffering in the glorious escapades (for so common sense must class them) of Teneriffe and St. Vincent. He had had the glory; she the suffering.

Pious, too, after his own manner of decent Church of England piety: God and the King!—the King not so very far behind. There too he could open his inmost heart to her and be sure of her prayers commingled with his own. Naturally there were professional matters one could not tell even the most valuable wife. Not for women the anxieties and responsibilities of such a career as his. Their timidity could not support it. In that department a woman had neither help nor counsel to offer—nothing but her prayers, and her joy when all was safely accomplished. But that was much—much! It filled his soul with calm security and gratitude. For there were the bad women. He knew very well the type of captain's wife who spent his hard-won prize money on her own flaunting vanity, and coquetted with other men while he upheld the honour of England on distant seas. No, thank God, his Fanny was none of those tawdry jilts. She was a true good woman—"All that is valuable in a wife"—so he assured her and others.

Yet nothing can be perfect. The other captains, when they went home rejoicing on leave, were surrounded by flocks of apple-cheeked youngsters, something to fight for, to leave your honours to when a hammock with round shot at head and heels was the last bed for a sailor. But he did not trouble her with that want though it was a dull empty ache when he looked at his medals, just be-

cause he knew how deeply it rankled in her own heart. There was Josiah, and to him she was a devoted mother, but Josiah meant little enough to the Admiral though he did his best for him afloat and ashore, and she felt it—she felt it, poor girl!

No casual mistress, but a wife was Fanny. It would have seemed almost indecent, even had it been possible, to surround her with worship and homage, and draw a passionate inspiration from her kind frank countenance. She could never understand romance. And yet Nelson was not without his starry lady whose glove he wore on his helmet, whose beauty he protested with sword and word in all companies, for whose least favour he would have died a thousand deaths. Such a man must kneel on his heart's knees to some fair figure who shall crown him as he crowns her his Inspiration and All. And his was Glory, summed up in the name of England. So ride the knights of the Holy Ghost, the men whose eyes dazzle on a beauty unseen, yet most intimately known to them, each perceiving for himself that figure flitting ever on before with white feet that touch not the earth pollute, and hands that beckon to the goal that cannot be uttered: whose they are to serve eternally.

And now in his very worship came the turning point of Nelson's life, for woe be to the man who attempts to embrace her not by raising of the womanhood into God, but sinking of the Godhead into woman.

His physical and spiritual nerves were shocked, as it were, into profound amaze by the wonder of this woman, this Emma. For, where his Fanny stood earthbound she soared glorious. Fanny had never hindered him, but this one helped him as no other had ever done. Wordless, she understood. What mattered her beauty? Had she been the sorriest wench that ever smutted her face in a kitchen, and yet had done what she did, he could have

worshipped at her feet—as a true acolyte of his goddess Glory. She knew. With his own fierce energy, she flung herself into the fight: she won the troops for Toulon, the chance of victory for his fleet. That white soft hand had dealt out ruin to Napoleon, and he, Nelson himself, was but her sword.

Exaggerated? No doubt, but men of his type exaggerate gloriously, and in that is their strength. As he sailed down the Mediterranean to Syracuse, armed with her order, far beyond reach of the foolish King's forbidding, her face fled before him encircled with rays that mingled her with England and made them one. He had not a sexual thought concerning her. So much a part of his inward aspiration had she become that sometimes he almost doubted her real, but rather a part of the dreams of moonlight nights and long calms on swaying seas.

But one thing grew in his soul to a most fiery purpose. She had not failed him. He would return her full measure pressed down and running over. To his simple and pious soul she became the Will of God—His justice upon the evil deeds of France—and possibility of failure passed as utterly from his mind as though the deed were done already, and the Frenchmen scattered with their ruined dream of power, mere wreckage of the English seas. But for all that it was a bitter and wearing chase, and though he dreamed of her the suspense left cruel marks.

For want of English frigates, the scouts of the Fleet, the French ships had slipped past and down the Mediterranean as fast as wind could carry them. Nelson's necessities had given them the heels of him and where to find them he could not tell. Later he wrote to Hamilton: "Having gone a round of six hundred leagues at this season of the year, here am I, as ignorant of the situation of the enemy as I was twenty-seven days ago." And again, "If I were now to die, the word *frigates* would be found

written on my heart." Maddening, if he had not been upborne by the inner certitude that England and Emma gave him for an inward peace in the midst of turmoil.

He made for Syracuse for the food and water he owed to her—her only. And thence he wrote to her and to her husband, exulting. Guarded, for neither the Queen nor Emma must appear; but yet exultant.

"My dear friends, thanks to your exertions we have victualled and watered, and surely, watering at the fountain of Arethusa, we must have victory. We shall sail with the first breeze, and be assured I will return either crowned with laurel or covered with cypress."

And now begins the great epic of the Nile.

Casting his mind over all the sea, Nelson was inclined to believe the French destination was Alexandria, yet could not be certain, and mistake was ruin. He summoned aboard his flagship the four captains in whom he placed his utmost confidence: Saumarez, Troubridge, Ball and Darby. One may picture the conference in the Admiral's cabin of the *Vanguard*—the awful issues hanging upon decision, and Nelson's worn face flame-white at the end of the table. He believed in his own heart that he might have broken down physically but for that inner certitude. "On the 18th I had near died with the swelling of the vessels of the heart." And he held grimly on.

The little council of war had decided for Alexandria, and so with a favouring wind away goes the Fleet down the Mediterranean, not only Nelson's own reputation at stake, but England—all—if he has erred. A terrible cast of the dice for a young admiral, not even a commander in chief. But he never feared responsibility.

And in the afternoon of the 1st August, 1798, the mast-head lookout of the *Zealous* changed the course of the world's history by announcing the enemy, lying in

Aboukir Bay, fifteen miles east of Alexandria. The chase is ended.

Since that great battle of the Nile has been told in poetry and in the cool precision of naval historians, shall a mere romancer attempt the middle, the impossible course? Better leave it immense, vague, majestic, half hidden in the smoke of guns and drowned in their uproar. It is a battle of the Titans, the foes of centuries at death-grips for the mastery of the world: the old and new worlds tremble in the balance; the American continent, the ancient glories of the Moguls in India, are all at stake in Aboukir Bay; and while the ships lock together in a horrible bridal flash and roar in groups, in duel, and solitary terrible combat, no man yet can say which way the inevitable scale will turn. No man but one. He knows. He has read the purpose of Heaven in Naples, in Syracuse, and he cannot doubt. Wounded in the head, believing death at hand, still he clings to his certitude, giving his orders now from the cabin where the surgeons have in vain implored him to lie down and take what rest is possible in the seaquake and thunder shaking the ship.

And then Captain Berry rushes below with great, yet terrible news. The mighty *Orient*, the French flagship, boastfully named for her errand, is on fire, and the British Captains are directing their guns on the flames, friendly to them, that none may dare to extinguish them. Wound or no wound Nelson is on deck next moment, to see the ships, friend and foe, alike veering or slipping their cables lest the frightful catastrophe should involve them also in ruin; one English ship, the *Alexander*, clinging bulldog-like to her prey until all but aflame, then sullenly withdrawing. The gallant French gunners below are still firing—they do not know the hell on deck—and Nelson, white, bloody, clinging to a stay for support with his one

arm, gives orders that his only boat still serviceable be launched to help the survivors in the immense catastrophe that all now see at hand and draw back to watch in a mute horror. The great flames soar up to zenith. It is hell, hell, before their eyes; and slowly, sullenly, one by one her guns cease firing. They are done, their gunners dead and dying beside them; and at last there is silence but for the crackling and singing of flame, and then with a roar that storms heaven itself, the mighty ship blows up, and a deadly quiet settles on the sea beneath the calm incurious eyes of the Egyptian stars looking down on floating and human wreckage.

"Almighty God having blessed His Majesty's arms with victory, the Admiral intends returning public Thanksgiving for the same at two o'clock this day; and he recommends every ship doing the same as soon as convenient.

"*Vanguard.* Off the Mouth of the Nile. 2nd, August, 1798."

It is done. The Mediterranean is English once more and Napoleon's dream of French domination in Egypt broken. *Non nobis Domine* is the cry on Nelson's lips—Not unto us, O Lord; not unto us.

But she was His instrument; without her, it could not have been done. He knows it. She shall have the earliest news if it be at all in his power. She, who struck with him in every blow, to whom every man in the Fleet owes his devotion; Saint Emma, as he was to call her later.

Captain Hoste should carry his news, the Admiralty despatches should go through Naples, but nothing in heaven or earth should keep himself from Naples, that he might thank, praise, bless her, who had made all things possible to him and to England. Europe lifted her head

and rejoiced with exceeding great joy; India also, for he sent a messenger speeding to Bombay by Aleppo and Baghdad to announce that the menace was crushed, and Clive's work perpetuated forever.

She was in the room of mirrors watching as she watched now daily, for news from the Fleet. Her life was almost unbearably anxious. Sir William, torn from the peaceful pursuits of years of dilettantism and converted in spite of his aversion into a serious diplomat, was gravely ill more than once from the strain.

It could not be otherwise, for he was hard upon sixty-eight, and the whole world-struggle was centring in the Mediterranean so that Naples, which had been the appointment *par excellence* for idle delights, became the most strenuous point of the pitched battle with the French by sword and pen. The Queen was aged and querulous with unceasing cares and the misery of a foolish husband undermining her at every turn. She made her own mistakes, too, in plenty; of cruel harshness in dealing with the incipient revolutionaries of Naples and Palermo, and foolish efforts which weakened her cause. And every day she leaned more heavily on Emma, and every day Emma responded with more feverish zeal. Mistaken also, often enough, but with the clear purpose of breaking the revolution, and aiding Nelson and England, and the Two Sicilies through them.

So she watched at her window, with Sir William, ill and a little querulous also beside her, and saw a ship coming up the bay. The Queen was at her Palace at Caserta; the city lay sweltering under the August heat. She herself was enervated and half exhausted, suffering the reaction of a fierce excitement and prolonged suspense.

Guns—the salute to the Royal flag at San Elmo, the forts replying. She hurried out breathless. A ship that had the air of a battered sea-bird, making harbour

after long gales and struggles. A small ship—the *Mutine*. She delayed neither at Capri nor Ischia, she came steadily on and dropped anchor as near shore as possible.

Emma did not awake the sleeping old man, since the guns had failed to do it. After all, it might be nothing, a trifle, and he needed rest; but again and very quietly, she took his glass and watched proceedings with a pitying glance first at the wrinkled face and dropped jaw beside her. A boat putting off from the ship. How often now she had watched those boats and tried to guess their errands!

She arranged her hair and went quietly to the reception room. It probably would mean that Nelson had news of the French Fleet and a battle was imminent. Still—still suspense!

Time is long when one waits, however one may control oneself, and though she sat at first resolutely, presently she was pacing up and down, quicker and quicker as the pulses beat faster in her brain.

What was that! A cheer in the distance!—the screeching foreign cheer she had ridiculed with Nelson. It came nearer; it gained volume. Yes, the people were screaming like mad. Naples was yelling for joy. For what? For what?

She rushed to the windows. Two uniformed young men were walking, swiftly, steadily to the Embassy, looking neither to the right nor left. Whatever the cheers came from it was not from any words of theirs. They spoke neither to each other nor to any one else, and still the crowd ran after them, yelling, cheering.

She could bear it no longer. She flew to the entrance where many of the Embassy servants, men and women, had assembled. And as the officers neared it, she stood there, white and strained to receive them, both hands clasped upon her fluttering heart.

"What is it?" she shaped with her pale lips but could get out no word.

They knew her. Hoste and Capel had both shared her hospitalities. They waved back the crowd at the gates, and came running lightly up the approach.

"Madam, a great, a glorious victory. The French Fleet annihilated."

And as the words left Hoste's lips, some strain seemed to snap in her. She flung up her arms and fainted dead away, falling cruelly on the marble steps before them.

They thought they had killed her. They carried her between them into the long cool room of so many agitations and Sir William was awaked and came down; trembling, incredulous. "Thank God!" he said, when they told him, and even then could scarcely take it in. He ran and announced it from the steps of the Embassy while Emma still lay in her death-like swoon, and the populace dispersed, running also shouting to carry the news all over the city. Then and then only, he devoted himself to her, and saw her faint eyelids flutter, and the pale rose dawn again in lip and cheek.

She was badly bruised from the fall. But what of that? Joy is a great physician, and presently she was sitting up, propped on cushions with the two eager young men raining their story upon her in reply to her passionate questions. Oh, joy of joys, glory of glories! Could she write to Nelson? Yes—for they must stay three days and then rejoin him with the utmost speed. But she must take them out to Caserta—the Queen must hear. Ill? Faint? she repelled the thought with indignation. Not an hour, not a minute must be lost. "My cloak—my hat! Order the carriage!"

They could not stay her, a whirlwind would not have done that, and English flags were ordered for the carriage, and a garland for each horse's neck, and she and

Sir William with the two young men got into it and were driven through the raving streets, she bowing, smiling, pointing to them with gestures of Roman pride: a younger Volumnia, drunk with joy, scarcely herself knowing what she said and did.

She has been censured for this. Persons of superior breeding have called it "bad taste" and certainly it was exuberant and unrestrained. But there are moments in life when taste does not appear the one thing necessary to salvation. Naples must know its saviour. It must know that the slight, pale sailor of their memories had met that Apocalyptic power of Napoleon undismayed and had conquered. Rome might be in the hands of the French, but Naples was free.

So they came to Caserta and the vast Palace, Emma leading her three men, proud as an Empress, through the immense marble halls, and up the broad, lion-guarded staircase. They were English. She was English. She would speak for them. Italy might flaunt with her marble palaces, but England was her protector.

The Queen stood in the great cool salon, the dim sunshiny air sweet with flowers. Two ladies stood behind her. Her face was worn almost to attenuation with gnawing care and bitter angers. She had not seen Emma for some days. There had been a lull since the visit of Nelson, and she had had her own sore troubles with the King over the victualling business.

Now Emma approached, walking magnificently; an almost visible light encircling her.

"Madam, I bring Your Majesty great news, glad news! Your enemies are crushed. The immortal Nelson has destroyed the French Fleet at Aboukir." Her voice never shook. She was in complete control of herself. "And lives," she added, "for fresh and greater victories, if they are needed."

Marie Caroline stared at her, as if unbelieving.

"Send for the King," she gasped, and one of the ladies ran, almost tripping over her long skirt at the door. He came hurrying, shambling in, his large mouth open foolishly, his big hands shaking.

"News? What is it?"

The Queen motioned with dry lips to Emma.

"Nelson has destroyed the French Fleet at Aboukir. Thanks be to God Almighty. Their day is done."

The Queen broke down into wild sobbing, her ladies clustering about her. The King, with a false joy illuminating his face, sprang forward and clasped the hands of Hoste and Capel.

"And the Admiral? Is he well—the dear and great man?"

The whole room seemed to dissolve into a mere clamour of congratulation, question and answer. The Queen clasped Emma about the shoulders and kissed her cheek passionately, and Emma, radiant, laughing, rejoicing, cried aloud her English "Hip, hip, hurra!" and every soul present joined in it as best they might.

"Take me back," she gasped to Sir William, at length, "that I may write to our immortal Nelson."

How she wrote the world knows. It was her victory as well as his. He owned it, the Fleet owned it. What should she write, what words could ever hold her swelling pride and triumph? Even yet, a century and more away, they pulse and throb with a burning life-blood.

He had written to her too in that great hour. She held his letter in her hand.

"Emma, for God's sake, rest," Sir William entreated when they got home. How could she? She brushed him aside, and got her pen and wrote with a hand that stumbled at her racing thoughts. She could not. She was

forced to lay it aside a day or two, by mere physical weakness.

"September 8th, 1798.

"My dear, dear Sir,

"How shall I begin! What shall I say to you. 'Tis impossible I can write for I have a fevour caused by agitation and pleasure. God, what a victory! Never, has there been anything half so glorious, so compleat. I fainted when I heard the joyfull news and fell on my side and am hurt. I should feil it a glory to die in such a cause. No, I would not like to die until I see and embrace the Victor of the Nile. How shall I describe to you the transports of Maria Carolina. She fainted and kissed her husband, her children, walked about the room, cried, kissed, embraced every person near her, exclaiming, 'Oh, brave Nelson. Oh, God bless and protect our brave deliverer. Oh, Nelson, Nelson, what do we not owe to you. Oh that my swolen heart coud now tell him personally what we owe to him.' You may judge, my dear sir, of the rest. The Neapolitans are mad with joy, and if you was here now you woud be killed with kindness. Not a French dog dare show his face. How I glory in the honner of my country and my countryman. I walk and tread in air with pride, feeling I was born in the same land with Nelson and his gallant band. Little dear Captain Hoste will tell you the rest. He dines with us in the day for he will not sleep out of his ship. He is a fine good lad. If he is only half a Nelson he will be superior to all others. I send you two letters from my adorable Queen. We are preparing your apartment against you come. I wish you coud have seen our house the three nights of illumination. 'Tis, 'twas covered with your glorious name. Their were 3 thousand lamps and their shoud have been 3 millions if we had had time. For God's sake come to

Naples soon. I woud have been rather an English powder-monkey or a swab in that great victory than an Emperor out of it.

"The Queen as this moment sent a Dymond ring to Captain Hoste, six buts of wine and every man on board a guinea each.

"My dress from head to foot is *alla* Nelson. Ask Hoste. Even my earrings are Nelson's anchors; in short, we are be-Nelsoned all over. I send you some sonets, but must have taken a ship on purpose to send you all written on you. My mother desires her love to you."

Nelson read that letter; his heart throbbing as he read. Who can understand as she could—none, none, in all the wide world, for she was a part of it. Dear Fanny! She will write fondly, and with a natural pride, but this one—Emma!—why a man may see her heart is almost bursting for triumphant tumultuous joy. She alone feels as he does. Their hearts beat together. The beautiful exultant creature! Yes, Fanny will write, but it will not be like this. Oh, to see her, to hear her voice repeating his own transports. Every word of Hoste's feeds his flame of gratitude.

"By God, sir, she's the loveliest, most wonderful woman in all the world! She so touched off your doings that I declare I realized them afresh in her words. Capel can talk of nothing else. She dazzled him."

Indeed, Nelson himself was dazzled. He had never drunk so sparkling, so maddening a draught, with all his triumphs. Europe poured her gratitude at his feet. Her saviour! A peerage from his own England, with a pension of £2000 a year and a gift of £10,000 from the Great East India Company whose dominions and commerce he saved, an autograph letter and diamonds from the Czar, a diamond feather from the Grand Turk with a

sable pelisse also from "that good Turban soul," as Emma called him—but why enumerate all the gifts and glories, indeed beyond enumeration? There was one he coveted more than any—the look in those eyes that saw into his own soul with perfect sympathy; the sound of that voice which for him bore the sweetness of fame, the thrill of glory.

On the 22nd September he came to Naples in his battered *Vanguard* and no warning breathed from blue air and bluer seas. All was gladness.

Yet there a greater danger than any from any enemy awaited him. His own heart. And hers.

CHAPTER XXI

THE GARDEN OF ARMIDA

In those days every interest of Naples centred on the sea and the news it might bring. The French were still occupying the republic they had made of Rome and Roman territory and therefore the menace, broken on the sea, was still very near them by land. But what did that count in the whirlwind of praise and admiration they were preparing for the coming of Nelson? He who had performed miracles could perform yet another.

Emma fanned the flame with all her power, and her power was not small. Sir William was ill and tired with anxiety. He could rise to the occasion on an emergency, but more and more the reins of power dropped from aging hands and as they dropped she gathered them up, silently, skilfully, and Nelson knew—and not Nelson only—that she was virtually the British Ambassador in Naples. An amazing position for a beautiful woman of thirty-three even if her antecedents had been those of one of the English governing families, but almost terrifying when her life and misfortunes are considered. And the more so because the French Jacobins were interested in discovering any blot on the scutcheon of their inveterate enemy. Their agents in London searched out every detail of her life. Nothing was unknown to them, and then they set to work to embellish what needed no embellishment. "The Neapolitan Messalina" they called her and defeated their own object except in France, for even the most censorious knew that she had been a stainless wife to Sir William; never a breath to the contrary

had sullied her. Indeed, her faith to him, her deep enthralling gratitude for the great gifts he had given, became her conscience, and not Lucretia herself was more circumspect than Emma.

Perhaps she was not very severely tempted. There is a modern writer who holds that there is no such thing as temptation in the usual sense of the word, that when two alternatives are presented the mental struggle is merely one of discrimination on grounds low or high according to the mental status of the man, and that invariably he succumbs to the delight that draws him most strongly, and can do no otherwise. St. Augustine, skilled in the windings of the human heart, declares that "we needs must follow what most delights us." It may be a fatal passion wrestling with the longing for the pure heart, the position that cannot be impugned, the answer of what is called a clear conscience, but that the line of least resistance must and will be followed is as certain as that night follows day.

To Emma, besieged by many lovers, vain and lighthearted, in love with success and admiration, there had been many so-called temptations since the happy day which made her Lady Hamilton. She trifled with them, laughed and passed on, for she discriminated. It might be pleasant to have princes sighing at her feet, but she had tasted the insecurities of vice and was far more passionately tempted by her great position and the power, the enlarged stage it gave her. She had but to remember how easily the bonds of mere passion are broken and the woman always the scapegoat, to cling with all the rigidity of virtue to her honours.

And there was gratitude to Sir William, truly and deeply felt, to set side by side with the knowledge that no other man in the world could give her what he gave—the chance to distinguish herself in the theatre of Europe.

In other words, she had never as yet been tempted. She had never seen anything she could for one moment weigh against all she held in the hollow of her hand.

As to Nelson, commingled with his burning gratitude for her help, and the strange and shining glamour that surrounded her in his soul, his heart was faithful to his Fanny. He was the child of the parsonage, trained to habits of prayer and reference of his daily concerns to God—except, indeed, when matters went very contrary with him, and a good round oath or two would speed the business; but then God would not be hard upon a sorely tried seaman who admitted with contrition that he was in the wrong, and who did his utmost for a country whose cause was God's.

Bad men were faithless to their wives. He had kept his eyes open in foreign ports and knew, and he was aware that this was a subtle poison which sapped the character in subtle ways. He was not analytic by any means, and could have given no reason for it, but knew very well he would sooner have his clean-living Troubridge or Collingwood beside him when the French were in the offing than a ladies' man like *X* or *Y* with a wife in every port. The two kinds of stability went together and he could not tell why. He despised the lax livers. And since his country and the service came first with him, he also had had no difficulty in discrimination between idle passion and duty.

So with blare of trumpet and beat of drum and flutter of flags against blue skies, the battered, victorious Fleet came slowly up by Capri on a cloudless September day, and Emma, conscious of personal glories past and to be which fused and melted in the rays of Nelson's halo, prepared herself for the greatest day of her experience. The Queen was ill, worn out with joy and grief, and the Ambassadress would be the chief lady, even surpassing in interest the Crown Princess Clementine. The long-suffer-

ing Teresa was wild with excitement. Excellenza must shine, must eclipse all others on this day when the Great Admiral, the saviour of Italy, was coming to receive her homage. A dress had been specially prepared; white, of course; with the pale blue sash which Emma still preferred to all else, and across the shoulder and breast a broad ribbon like that of the Bath with the words "Nelson of the Nile" embroidered in bullion. Red, white and blue, the onlookers shall observe! About her neck hung his miniature set in small pearls and painted by the artistic Miss Cornelia Knight, acting at this time almost as her informal secretary. She was "alla Nelson" as she phrased it, from head to rosetted shoes.

When she descended to the carriage that was to take them to the Royal yacht, Sir William looked at her with pride and pleasure. His fondness was taking on the tone of a father to a favourite daughter as he aged and she blossomed.

"I never saw you look better, Emma mia. Now spare yourself a little, I entreat you. It will be a day of great emotions, and you know how these excitements try you."

He might well say that. A more highly strung, emotional woman never breathed, and her nights had been restless and disturbed for weeks owing to the troubles brewing in the city and fomented by the French Jacobins who came and went. The Queen also lingered during the hot weather at her Palace of Caserta and it was a long and weary way for the necessary conferences. She promised, to quiet the kind old man, and they drove down to the sea.

The King was waiting to hand the Ambassadress to the yacht. It was her day, every one admitted that, and by a graceful waiving of precedence she was led on board even before the young wife of the Heir Apparent, the

Princess Clementine, who drew back and refused to stir a step until Emma had been escorted. It never even flashed across her mind how strange are the turns of Fortune's wheel, as curtseying she obeyed the very great young lady. Yet it might have done, for that very morning's mail had brought her a pompous, somewhat too respectful letter from—whom?—Sir Harry Fetherstonehaugh of Up Park, congratulating her as the wife of England's representative on "the glorious victory of our immortal Nelson" and her share in it, which had flown, magnified by millions of tongues, back to England.

It was in bad taste in spite of all its homage, and a more sensitive woman would have winced under it, but not Emma. It enchanted her that he should know her triumph, should know he had cast her out not to infamy and poverty, but to glory and honour beyond all his imaginings. He, a man, with money and position, had made nothing of his life (she knew of his marriage from Greville), he was one of the mere public. She, a woman and cruelly handicapped, sat in the seats of the mighty, and at the helm of great events. She showed it to Sir William, from whom she had no secrets, and told him she had half a mind to answer it. He drily recommended her to throw it in the fire and think of it no more.

Privately, she laughed to herself at the King's forced gaiety as he led her on board. He tried for a holiday face and with poor success for he was still in the hands of the Anglophobe party and she knew it, and he knew she did. But the day was glorious, the bunting a-flutter and the eyes of Europe on Naples. What did it matter?

Emblems of victory flew from each mast of the Royal yacht; the awnings glittered like Cleopatra's barge. Lady Hamilton, reclining in the stern, might have passed for the lovely Egyptian about to meet Mark Antony. Music

winged their way, triumphal odes composed by Cimarosa —every boat that followed was vocal. Naples afloat to greet her Liberator.

And thus they approached the Fleet—dark, war-worn, huge—lying at anchor off Capri. Even the music and shouting were stilled for a moment as they drew near that tremendous spectacle and saw the wounds that war had made in those stern sides. France had left her mark deep on them: shot-marked, splintered, jury masts rigged where the others had fallen, they clustered together, formidable still, but wearied, wearied. There is no creation of man which so shares and reflects his emotions as a ship, and these were neither rejoicing nor triumphant with flag and music, but dumb, suffering, implacable. The flagship, "the poor wretched *Vanguard*," as Nelson called her, seemed almost to mock the mirth of the Royal yacht by her dumb endurance.

But the yacht came alongside, and above them frowned the yawning ports with their hidden hell of guns. The whole scene and its cruel contrasts struck hot on Emma's emotions. She stayed neither for King nor Princess, she cared not what eyes were on her, what tales malice might spread. She ran up the ladder, tripping on her dress, caring nothing, feeling nothing, till she knew her foot on English soil once more (for every English battleship is England) and there was Nelson waiting with his group of officers, collected from all the ships, his face white and nerve-shaken. She ran to him wildly, pale, transported with a like emotion, and so, sobbing out half senseless words—"Is it possible? O God, is it possible!" fell half fainting against him and could say no more, shaking from head to foot, and clinging to him lest she should fall at his feet. It was the last entry she would have chosen to make, but she was blown in the wind of feeling beyond her control.

With Troubridge's help, who stood near him, he supported her with his one arm, and all the warriors closed round the Patroness of the Navy, forgetting for an instant the slowly following King, and more alarmed by this feminine weakness than by the French guns bellowing about them at Aboukir; and quickly her colourless cheek regained its colour and she blushed to find herself the centre of so much attention and begged them to neglect her, and was the more assiduously waited on.

"I have not slept of late. It is that!" says she, looking apologetically in Troubridge's face. "I felt it as every English woman must do."

"Of course, madam, of course. What else? God knows I can sympathize. Not a man in the Fleet but has slept the uneasier for the Admiral's wound. Look at him!"

She looked and again the colour ebbed from her lips. He was dead white. Every little bone stood out in his face, and a fever-spot burned on either cheek that made the hollow beneath cruel. His hair was combed low on his forehead to hide the raking tear made by the piece of iron that had struck his head at Aboukir and so stunned him that for weeks after he declared he was scarce answerable for what he wrote.

If his ship was battered, so too was he. She had not known nor guessed how sorely. There was not much of the man left to give for England now—his arm, his eye, this wound! A pain like a mother's woke in her heart to see it, while Troubridge continued:

"The day we sent off Captain Hoste with despatches he was taken with a fever, Your Excellency, that had very near done his business. Indeed, for eighteen hours we gave him up. I wish to God he could have quiet and nursing better than we can give him. For, though every heart in the Fleet loves him, men are unhandy nurses, your Ladyship knows."

She listened, trembling. The King was talking—talking—would he never cease? Could he not see the exhaustion in the man's face before him? The Princess now. Good God, when would they have done? She edged up to her husband as soon as she got a moment and repeated Troubridge's words.

"Sir William dear, we must have him ashore. We must nurse him at the Embassy."

He was as eager as she. When did Sir William ever turn his back on a friend? They took their chance when the captains were crowding about the King, and then it was broached.

"Oh, God!" he cried. "If you did but know how it sounds to me! An English bed, and quiet, and to be away from the sea noises and the trampling, and the dashing of waters. My friends, 'tis half a health to me to see your kind faces. It would be a whole health to have rest."

She noticed him more nervous, more emotional than he had been. A blow on the head—well, not surprising—but she would nurse him.

"I have letters from my wife that I must answer," he said later. "No, my dear lady, no use to beseech me not to write awhile. I know it tries my head; indeed the ache when I write is almost unbearable, but she must hear if I drop."

Emma would have given much to see those letters and know if the unseen Fanny rejoiced as she rejoiced. She did not as yet realize her sufficiently to bear her any enmity. Why should she? A tame English wife far, far away in a dull English village! Indeed, she seemed to have little to do with their great concerns.

She got him on shore that evening after a day of excitement to wear down a man all beef and sinew instead of the worn-out invalid she saw him. A perfect bedroom was appointed to his service away from the hot September

sun and full of cool and healing glooms. His sitting-room was adjoining where he could lie and watch at a safe distance the work in hand repairing the wounds of the ships. Troubridge's *Culloden* was barely afloat; his own *Vanguard*—her masts, by good fixing, might or might not hold out until he could get her to Gibraltar to refit. In short, at Naples he must stay awhile whether he would or not.

Officers came and went, but Emma shielded him where she could. He called her his guardian angel. One or two of his Fanny's letters he showed to her and Sir William with pride. They should see how elegantly she expressed herself, how firm her trust in the Providence which had preserved and would preserve him yet. Indeed, those innocent wifely letters might have been published to the Fleet, so universal were they in the expression of a wife's calm pride and joy in great achievements. She thanked him also very gratefully and touchingly for her share in his honours. "Baroness Nelson of the Nile"—had she ever thought she would live to see herself so uplifted? She must tell him, too, of the village rejoicings in his greatness. He would not despise these amid the applauses of Europe. The dear old farmer by the parsonage had said so and so. Old Goody Twoshoes had clasped her hands—he would remember! He did, and it touched him like a far, faint echo from days in another lifetime. For here was Emma beside him, cooling his temples with her fan, her lavender essence, her sweet care that shaded the windows to perfection yet admitted the soft Parthenopean breeze. Her voice rehearsed the honours and gifts awaiting him in Naples.

"Oh, my friend, your glory!" she said, leaning her head back in the armchair beside his sofa, a wandering sunbeam caught in her hair and eyes. "We have just had another letter. No, you shall not read it; it wearies your

brain. Listen to me. The Grand Turk has written to King George to beg you may wear the diamond feather he took from his own turban to decorate you! Did ever any one hear of such a thing! I declare I could turn Turk for love of the dear old gentleman. I believe it's the sign of sovereignty in Turkland. 'Viva il Turco!' says Emma."

She cried it, clapping her hands for joy, and must needs twist up a scarf into a turban and parade the room, pretending herself a favourite sultana, and so lovely that had the Grand Turk seen her he must have offered Sir William millions of piastres on the spot to buy her for the Light of the Hareem, as Nelson declared.

"But I wouldn't go!" cries she, sitting down, still in the turban. "I had rather be the glorious Nelson's nurse than mistress of the world. Pray, pray, my Lord, if he sends the Turkish frigate here to congratulate you in all the forms, send the commander to me that I may entertain the good Turban soul."

"Why, what would you do with him?" says Nelson, enjoying the little comedy.

"Why, I would heap him with honours and kindness and send him home convinced that an Englishwoman at all events has a soul. They say theirs haven't, so I'm told, but God knows I have, and I love him for the honour his master has done to the friend of our hearts. So I do."

"You wonderful woman—who ever doubted you had a soul!" He was looking at her with all his heart in his face. "Why, it overflows in every word you say and look you look. 'Tis easy to forget you have a body at all for all it's so beautiful, and think you an angel just touching the earth and to fly away again from men not worthy of you."

"Flatterer, flatterer!—and I that thought Nelson all truth and simplicity." She put her finger on his lip to

silence him and he kissed it. "But indeed, Nelson, I grudge at the poor beggarly honours from England. They have not done for you what they did for St. Vincent —St. Vincent!—a rush light to a star! Now listen! If I was King of England I'd have made you, with one stroke of my pen, Duke Nelson, Marquis Nile, Earl Aboukir, Viscount Pyramid, Baron Crocodile, and Prince Victory! —so that all the world might stare when you was announced. Now—what do you say!"

He laughed and laughed. She never tired him and her happy laughter was his lullaby. Baron Crocodile, she often called him after that. When she was not with him, she was planning the glorification for his birthday which the Royal Family and all Naples would have whether he would or not.

He snatched his minutes from these enchantments to write to Fanny and to exalt the Hamiltons as indeed bare gratitude demanded. Their goodness no tongue could tell, and if he was proud of late events his chief pride lay in the fact that he was his father's son, her husband, and the friend of the Hamiltons. So he wrote.

Emma wrote also—a wife would naturally wish to hear from her husband's friend.

But she wrote without her wonted exuberance. Those *bourgeoise* women locked in their dull villages—what could they know of the great world and its doings? And the little she had heard of Fanny convinced her that she would be of the Queen Charlotte type of woman; prim, prudish, inclined to consider that all freedoms partake of the nature of sin. She wrote, therefore, warmly but guardedly and submitted the letter to Nelson, who, quite unskilled in women's instincts, was certain it must give my lady the utmost pleasure.

Doubtless it ought. But Fanny, too, had cares mingled in her triumphs. Many of the Jacobin stories of

Emma's past came to London and some blew like thistledown to Norfolk, where they seeded. All her British instincts protested against the Scarlet Woman enthroned in high places. It was like the vile looseness of these foreigners. Sir William Hamilton should be made aware of his country's displeasure! And then came Nelson's first letter from Naples.

"She does honour to the station to which she is raised!" —Fanny's eyes grew hard as she read those foolish words. So like Horatio! So like all men, dazzled by a pretty face, and forgetful of every essential! It would have taken very much more than Emma's warm but circumspect letters to convince her that there was no danger in the Embassy and its kindnesses. And Josiah's descriptions—now a young man of nineteen—were not reassuring.

"Lady H. is a beautiful woman, but not like you, mother. She is too friendly, too noisy. I describe very ill, but I find no one can look at anything else when she is there. Sir Horatio she has always in tow."

That sufficed. In a flash Fanny's opinion was formed. Had Emma written with an inspired pen she could not have pleased her. What did *she* want thrusting herself in and complaining of the British Government's inadequate reward to her husband? "Hang them, *I* say!" she had ended. Vulgar!—was Lady Nelson's comment—what one would expect. Unseen, the two women were in opposition.

The galas at the Embassy would have infuriated her could she have seen them. My Lady Ambassadress received every one of note with a lavish and splendid hospitality which left Sir William looking ruefully at his accounts when they came in. Indeed, Emma's gorgeous notions of their position began to embarrass him in any case. He feared the Etruscan vases must suffer.

But the rapture, the glorious delight in her face, swept both him and Nelson away. Indeed, within the limits due tc an invalid, nothing was left undone to do him honour and Emma with him. Sir William was relegated to the background, a mere shadow of an ambassador, all his authority merged in his triumphant wife. Emma's best friend, not to mention Lady Nelson, might have thought she exceeded the bounds of good taste here. It was like the blaring of brass and scarlet and had Nelson's vanity not been nurtured gradually on a stronger and stronger diet of her praises it must have spoilt his stomach. Let the truth be told. Emma must have a master and a strong one to do herself justice. She had had it more or less in the boor, Sir Harry; she had had it certainly in the cool dominant Greville; and for years in her fear of Sir William's superiority. Now, the rein was slipping from Sir William's enfeebling hand. His age and her own marvellous achievement gave her a loose. She had the bit between her teeth, and Heaven knows where it would lead her. She flared like a bonfire in the pride of the Battle of the Nile, and indeed more leaked out of her services, though vague and indistinct, than was at all wise for the King's ears, the Queen's safety, or the credit that should only have crowned Sir William. She was overfamiliar with all.

As for Nelson, he was worn out and disgusted with all the fiddling and braying; with all but her, his twin soul; but slowly, under her proud care, the asses' milk prescribed in the fashion of the day, and a quiet sunshiny visit with her to Castellamare, he regained his strength, though never perhaps the equanimity of the days before that dangerous blow on the head.

It was night and they sat together in the room of the mirrors looking out into the quiet dark. The lights of the ships were twinkling far off, and a broad moonlight floated

translucent on the bay. She wore her evening dress and jewels, with a bandeau about her beautiful brow, rimmed with pearls and inscribed with his name. Sir William had fallen asleep for sheer exhaustion in his study, and Nelson's face was haggard with fatigue. Some officers were still in the next room discussing the events of Naples and the near sailing of the Fleet.

"A wonderful, wonderful time it has been," she said, leaning on the window sill, the moonlight and the low lamplight fighting for her loveliness. "Oh, Nelson, it was the greatest time of my life. There can never be such another."

"And it was all Emma's doings!" he said, looking into her eyes. He had taken to calling her by her name as Sir William always did in speaking of her to him. It had come to be an openly acknowledged friendliness.

"My doing? No. The world's doing. You have the world at your feet. It rings with your honoured name."

"You put it there!" he said, and clasped her hand. "We can't tell it wholly as yet for the Queen's sake, but whether I live or die, the world shall know one day that the Nile was Emma's battle. Not a gun would have been fired but for my friend."

"Ah, you say that now"—her eyes were like moonlight themselves, moonlight-brimmed, soft, mysterious—"but you leave in a few days, and you will forget. You will go back to Norfolk and be so happy with your wife that all these days together will seem like a dream."

"I shall never forget," he said steadily. "There is not a thought I can think in future but is inspired by you, bound up with you. You are the most wonderful woman I ever met."

"Your wife?"

"My wife is all that is valuable. I honour the ground she walks on. She is a wife to make a fireside home. But

you—God knows what you are—you dazzle me. Honour. That is you. Courage. You again. Wisdom, daring—all, all are you. I can't tell you from England in my thoughts. You inspire me."

She turned and looked at him with moonlight eyes.

"You love England."

"I love you," he said hoarsely, the very veins in his wounded temple throbbing.

"You love your wife," she insisted softly.

"I love you—you!" A pause, and the moonlight flooding the room—it bathed it, reflected from the great mirrors that brought the sea and sky about them.

She took his hand in hers and they looked at each other. Not a word, scarcely a breath. Slowly, slowly her eyes drew his—their faces were close, her breath was warm on his lips, her lips warmer. They kissed.

Shattering noise in the room. A chair knocked rudely over. Josiah Nisbet, wild with wine.

"Sir, you're my commanding officer, and I know I lay myself open to court martial, but you're my mother's husband, and I swear I'll die sooner than you shall carry on like this with another woman in her absence, be she who she may. Madam, you should be ashamed for yourself."

The shouting, the noise, horrible! Emma shrank back against the window wordless—the drunken cub! Nelson caught him with his one arm as he advanced roughly on her.

"Josiah, you're drunk, give over, or I'll send you on board under arrest!"

But still he stormed on, shouting, raving, the suspicions of days taking head in mad insults to his stepfather and the Ambassadress.

The faithful Troubridge heard it from the next room and dashed in.

"Nisbet, good God!—come away! My Lord! Madam!

Take no notice! He is mad drunk. Nisbet, if you don't come away, I'll knock you down."

Still foaming out insults, Troubridge got him to the ground, and roughly secured his arms behind his back. Gag him he could not, and still the hoarse shouting continued. Emma, on a signal from Nelson, had slipped out of the room, and Troubridge shouted for Capel and they dashed cold water over his head and got him away in a half comic, half tragic frenzy to the waterside and to a boat and so out of sight and hearing. A burlesque in a way. Men laughed in the wardrooms of the ships when they heard it, and not one but said the cub should be turned adrift after all his stepfather's goodness to him and endurance of his fat-head follies.

Yet also, there was not an eye but watched the beauty and the Admiral the closer when they were together, not an ear but was lengthened to catch the drift of gossip from that day on.

Josiah called next day and made his humble apology. He had been overtaken by drink in honour of the great victory and could not recall a single word he had said. Inexcusable, yet would the good Angel of the Fleet forgive the unforgivable? With forced kindliness that covered a pale rage and shame she forgave him for fear of worse, even wrote friendly-fashion of him in a letter to his mother a few days later, dreading what he might have said in that quarter. Nelson refused to see him. The insult to his commanding officer covered that.

But what, what had he seen, was her question to herself. That could neither be guessed nor opened up, and it left her face to face with her own judgment. Believe it or not who will, that kiss burnt on Emma's lips more scorching than to the chastest wife in England, for it opened up all the gulfs of memory. She *knew*. As a wretch, climbed from the quicksands dimpling and quivering beneath him,

knows their horrors, their slow unfolding of the doomed man body and soul, where another who has never struggled in them sees but the glassy pools on the surface and fears to wet his feet, so it was with Emma. A kiss! A word! She knew what dumb horrors might lie beneath a light approach, and trembled. But it could not help her. When the quicksands have the man by the foot, and a kiss a woman by the heart, what safety?

The day before the Fleet left, the lovers, for so indeed they were, met alone in the room of mirrors.

"Will you remember me? Will you write?" he asked, dry-lipped.

"Yes, yes," she whispered, and half choked on the thought of his going.

"We must write!" he said as if in half excuse. "There will be sharp work at Naples yet, and only you to guide it and protect the Royals."

"But I have you to help me," she insisted, clinging to his hand as if for life. A pause—then very slowly:

"Emma, did that cub sicken you at me, or reveal your heart to you? Have you avoided me the last few days for love's sake or fear?"

"Was I ever afraid?"

"Then it was love? You feared your own heart."

Suddenly she flamed out glorious.

"I don't fear my own heart. I love it because it loves my Nelson. No, how can we love each other too much? We love the same thing, glory and great deeds. We must love each other. But we will be true. I would not wrong my dear Sir William for all the wide world—no, not even for you that's more to me than any world."

"Good God—you're right!" he cried. "We can love each other and let it drive us on to deeds that will make the world look and worship. Inspire me, for you're mine, mine! But I will be true to my wife, and you to your

good husband, and we'll set an example of duty as well as of honour for all to see. My own, own Emma!"

He clasped her to his breast and drowned her in kisses —such kisses as had never yet touched her lips, and she should be a judge. His heart, his soul, his fiery honour, burnt in every one. And behind them stood Fate, and laughed cruelly in her sleeve at the old, impossible attempt to square the circle.

"We will make a compact," he said solemnly at length. "To love each other till death, yet never to step an inch beyond the line we draw now. To aid each other in our war against these French devils, as comrades, not as lovers, but as man and woman who love honour better than their own sufferings. Swear it, my Emma; my own heart's love."

"I swear it," she said, looking not at him but at the ground—and they sealed their compact with a last kiss that melted their souls in one. Or so it seemed to him.

And so the Fleet sailed from Naples.

PART IV

CHAPTER XXII

THE MERIDIAN

It appeared to Nelson in the anxious days coming on that Heaven itself had sent him the destined helper in his war against French domination. Two things were clear as noonday to the perception of his military genius: that Buonaparte if unchecked must rule the world, and that the theatre of Armageddon would be in the Mediterranean and lands adjacent.

And presently there was a fresh and cruel anxiety about Malta. And to all these matters, the miserable intriguing kingdom of the Two Sicilies was the key from its natural position and its harbours. Then to whom could he turn but to the marvellous woman who divined his thoughts even as he thought them, who used her unique position in the Court solely to aid his views, and who so believed in him, inspired him, that he could not say where the one blended with the other nor whether a thing was his own doing or hers?

It is easy to believe what falls in with one's own hopes and wishes, and it became a creed with the lovers that the interests of England and the Two Sicilies were one and that together they must stand and fall. If that were so then duty, honour, alike bound him to the service of that puny court and people. For him, Europe stood or fell with Mediterranean policy, and Emma, quick as intuition and quicker, saw it with him, and undertook to imbue the Queen with the Nelsonic doctrine.

He wrote perpetually to her and to Sir William. He drew up a paper outlining his policy, which she must

study. Can the imagination at all paint what it must have been to Emma—the Emma of the ghastly memories —to find herself the trusted counsellor of such a man, at such a time? It flattered her pride and ambition as they had never been flattered yet. She saw herself the very arbitress of Europe, and in those days, nothing, nothing seemed impossible to her powers. She flung all her exuberant energies into his service, for what they dreamed together he could execute, and who was to set a bound to their achievement?

And some day—here the baser elements stirred in her —some day—well, Sir William was old, ageing daily. There might be a future, splendid beyond all hopes—no, no, gratitude, everything, forbade her even to imagine such a thing. The present was enough. She had never known such a man—how could she? And he not only loved her but saw in her his guiding star, the inspiration deprived of which his own ardours must flag.

Sir William also fanned her flame. His long and hereditary experience of diplomacy had given him a remarkable insight and he saw the European problem as Nelson saw it. Every word he wrote to England played Nelson's game and emphasized the strategic consequence of the Two Sicilies. If Revolution raised its head there, goodbye to hope for Europe. Sir William indeed so devoted himself to the single task of rousing intelligence at home that Emma may be said to have presided at the Embassy.

It was well enough known along the Mediterranean coasts. The French intelligencers wrote to their home government that unless "Hamilton's wife" was removed, there was little hope of gaining Naples. They were right. "Le roi Caroline" was the true ruler, and she was Emma's mouthpiece. Day in, day out, Emma's mouth was opened to show forth Nelson's praise, and the echo of the guns of Aboukir thundered Amen.

She wrote long diary letters to her hero setting forth all their hopes and fears and lulling him and herself with references to Lady Nelson. That was a part of the compact. Truth to their respective bonds, and outside that, perfect comradeship.

She wrote: "The Queen yesterday said to me, 'The more I think on it, the greater I find it. My respect is such that I could fall at his honoured feet and kiss them.' You that know us both and how alike we are in many things, that is, I as Emma Hamilton, she as Queen of Naples, imagine us both speaking of you! I told Her Majesty we only wanted Lady Nelson to be the female *tria juncta in uno* for we all love you, and yet all three differently, and yet all equally, if you can make that out."

So she protested her loyalty to herself and him. She wrote to Lady Nelson again, congratulating her on Nelson's recovery, and his great deeds. In part, the common desire of the woman who is stealing the husband's allegiance, to stand well with the wife, to spare her any cruelty but the one; in part, surely, a nobler aim. If Lady Nelson would but respond, would enlist Emma's warm heart on her own behalf as well as his! That would be a safeguard—if they could be friends. But no; Fanny had heard the stories that were flying across the sea. She believed that a more dangerous than Circe herself lurked in her den strewn with men's bones in Naples.

She replied coldly, briefly, and Emma knew that the watch-dog Suspicion was guarding that gate with wary eye. It was not wonderful. Fanny knew well there was a change in Nelson's letters. She could set down something to work, to wounds, and the presence of anxieties. But yet—he had been in danger and anxiety many a day and oft, and there had been time for tender protestations. There were none now. She began to perceive what had never been pressed in upon her before, the grievous danger

of the long separation of husband and wife. Hitherto it had made him cling more fondly to the thought of home. Now—she doubted—doubted.

She might well doubt. Every day of absence from Emma endeared her to Nelson. It was home now where she was; not only the actual walls and sweetness of daily intercourse, but heart's home, where every word and look was understood and re-echoed. He missed her horribly at every turn. His very genius seemed to dwindle in her absence.

And in Naples things grew steadily worse. The French had been busy sowers and their grain was ripening for harvest. It became gradually clear to Emma and therefore to the Queen that the horrors of France might very well repeat themselves for the Royal Family. Always the face of her doomed sister Marie Antoinette hung before Marie Caroline, the piteous decapitated head, grey and discrowned, with deep tear-channels worn down the hollow cheeks. Neither royalty nor beauty, nor all the kings of all the world had availed to save her from that fate. And could Marie Caroline look at her own children, happy, unconscious, in the gardens of Caserta without remembering the sin crying aloud to God and man of the torture and degradation of soul and body deliberately inflicted on her nephew, the Royal child of France, the Dauphin, by the French Republicans? It is no wonder that even her courageous spirit darkened into ashes sometimes and might have been quenched but for Emma's confident energy and the white overshadowing wings of Nelson's Fleet.

For in November he returned to Naples. He could make the excuse that his orders were to protect the kingdom of the Two Sicilies, but though he stifled his knowledge as far as possible, he knew in his own soul what influence drew him. What was a foreign queen to an Eng-

lish Admiral? Yet he wrote: "I am, I fear, drawn into a promise that Naples Bay shall never be left without an English man-of-war. I never intended leaving the coast of Naples without one; but if I had, who could resist the request of such a queen?"

He was perpetually with the Hamiltons during that visit, and every impulse drew Emma to conquer his whole heart—if any of it were left unconquered. He still confused his passion for her with his passion for glory and that was her most powerful aid. It reacted in every way. It made her private interests one with the politics of the Two Sicilies. It made her indispensable to him at every turn of events.

There were the strangest moments of confidence between them in the half hours they could snatch together in the room of the mirrors when Hamilton was toiling in his office downstairs—moments of self-deception on Nelson's part which Emma half prayed might always continue, half longed to break into reality as her life had taught it to her.

"My Emma, my own true comrade, never was such a friendship as ours in all the world. We will prove that a man and woman may be friends, with the deepest love to bind them and yet loyal as brother and sister to every obligation of honour."

And this with her warm hand clasped in his, her violet-grey eyes glowing on him! She smiled, responsive.

"Yes, yes, it is true. We are not made of common clay, Nelson, you and me. What others cannot do, we can. See, I kiss your dear eyes with never a thought that your wife would scorn if she could know. I wish with all my soul she were here that I might serve her and show her that Emma's heart is true as steel to her and hers. You know it is true. I would have her know it also. What does she say of me in her letters?"

"She writes calmly but kindly. It is not her way like yours, my beloved, to expend her heart in writing or speaking, but indeed she is a good, good woman, and may Heaven desert me the day I cause her a pang that could be spared."

"Would she comprehend our friendship, do you think? Does she understand how great and commanding is your genius? Would she despise your poor Emma for her adoration of the gifts that have brought the world to your feet?"

"I have never known Fanny despise a living soul. She is all that is humble and kind," Nelson said gravely, "and I hope beyond expression that in days to come you and she may be friends and live in harmony which will make us indeed *tria juncta in uno*, to use your own dear words."

"She answered my letters coldly," says Emma with a moisture on her flower-soft lashes. "It cut me to the heart. Oh, if she could but know my heart's true friendship."

"She will. She shall. I have assured her of it in letter after letter. But let us talk of the Queen."

The subject was painful to him, until Fanny should indeed be brought to comprehend all his motives. But Nelson's simplicity blinded him to much he had better have realized. Those who knew him best knew it and feared. A vague rumour of what was called "the flirtation" spread along the Mediterranean and reached old St. Vincent. He, knowing Nelson, dismissed it with a shrug of his shoulders and the dictum that Nelson and Emma were a couple of silly sentimental fools, no worse, but he began to be on the alert nevertheless concerning the *Vanguard's* visits to Naples, to be impatient of the Sicilian imbroglio and to wish that Nelson would put the matter in Troubridge's or some other such man's capable hands and there leave it. Nelson and Emma were born romantics, he thought.

They fed each other's flame foolishly. It was all very well for himself, old and seasoned, to write to her that he was her knight errant. It was a very different and more dangerous matter for Nelson to play the part in earnest. He wished Lady Nelson would come out and look after him.

Lady Nelson wished it very much more eagerly herself. She scented danger—danger. She wrote and proposed it in tenderest wifely terms. They had been so long apart. She craved to see him. He answered hurriedly—impossible. She little realized the state of affairs out here, or she could never make such a proposal. The only result was to strengthen her suspicions of Emma and all her works.

The night before he sailed again, recalled by the commander in chief, he told Emma this episode, conscious himself of a half disloyalty in the very telling.

"She could not have come!" he said wistfully. "It was impossible. Yet how natural to wish it. It touched me."

"No woman who really considered your immense anxieties should wish to hamper you for one instant. Oh, my Nelson, what is the gratification of being together compared to doing your glorious duty? It half breaks my heart to part with my soul's friend. Yet I bid you go. I urge you. I would not keep you with me if even my life depended on it, for what is life without glory to souls like yours and mine? You have taught me this. I owe it to you, and I won't fail. I'll never fail."

He put his arm about her, so that her head rested quietly on his shoulder.

"Brave Emma! Good Emma! My friend of friends. The only one in the world that understands me. My soul is too great for them. They wound and bruise it because they cannot understand. I should be given a free hand in the Mediterranean to do what I would, and here am I

kept in leading strings like a sucking captain. Your Nelson has that in him that should make the world crawl before him, if it could find vent."

"And it shall—it will!" she whispered. "And I'll help. They should make you head of the Navy and put up a statue of pure gold to you in London if I had *my* way. Ignorant fools! They are not worthy of you. Who is?"

"Nor of you, nor of you!" he answered fondly.

Lovers' bombast, but the worst thing in the world for a man of his temperament and a woman of hers.

They could not do without the atmosphere of adulation that each provided for the other. They both grew more impatient, irritable, tyrannous, to all outside that enchanted ring. The Queen's rank protected her, but Sir William often had reason to remember Greville's dicta concerning Emma's "little spurts of temper," and Nelson on board his *Vanguard* was more impatient of the contradictions of events, more captious than his officers had ever known him. It might be that terrible blow on the head at the battle of the Nile, they thought, but certainly it made difficulties. It was unlucky, too, that St. Vincent, who knew him through and through, was already talking of relinquishing the command and returning to England, and of Lord Keith succeeding him; a man of colder, dryer nature; a martinet; the last man, in any case, to understand Nelson's complexities and give him rein where needful.

So the *Vanguard* sailed from Naples, and Nelson felt the world cold and inhospitable without her sweet flatteries and clinging yet inspiring adoration. He wrote more and more briefly to Fanny. The wound on his head, the pressure of business, were natural excuses. He felt himself in a maze of thoughts and feelings she could never understand. Poor Fanny!

But he wrote incessantly to Emma after leaving, let-

ters which contained a meaning between the lines which only she could read; the stain of kisses the sweeter because secret. No violent scandal had as yet arisen, for half the Fleet was in love with her courage, gaiety, and the gallant spirit enshrined in the fairest face that ever dazzled a sailor's eyes. She was the comrade of all; at their beck for any service she could render; and from Lord St. Vincent down to the midshipmen, they swore by her. It was still easy for men to believe that Nelson thought as they did and no more.

But Emma knew better. She who, in Greville's words, had always needed a master and must have the bit in her charming mouth and the bridle and whip to direct her, had now found a slave, and a slave who had conquered the coming master of Europe. She knew it as every woman knows her power, and her head swam with the knowledge. Good God! what should she do with him? The wrong thing—inevitably the wrong thing.

Nelson's judgment in naval matters was infallible, but set him on shore and he was a man like another; and the more fallible because his prejudices were so strong and the self-esteem the world and Emma combined to flatter was stronger daily. How could he ever think himself in the wrong? He and Emma knew the inmost facts of the situation. Who should contradict them? They went their own way.

They flung the Two Sicilies into helpless war with France in the Roman territory, and when the Army and the miserable King fled routed, there was nothing for it but a flight for the Royal Family to Palermo.

She lived a romance in those days and throve exceedingly on the sparkle and bubble of it. One may see her at the Royal Palace, daily with the Queen, exhorting, almost commanding. Nelson had advised her of Buonaparte's design on the Two Sicilies. In Austria was no

help; no, not even though Marie Caroline's daughter was Empress-Consort in Vienna. Palermo, Palermo and patience, had become the only hope for Neapolitan Royalty in these hard times.

"But I cannot, I cannot!" the pale Queen protested. "My dear friend, you may see for yourself that a King who flees is lost. Never again shall we regain our throne and Buonaparte has already a creature of his own to occupy it. I will die here. I will face my sister's fate from the Jacobins."

"If you die at your post, madam, I will remain and die with you," cried the impassioned Emma. "But Nelson advises flight, and did you ever know the saviour of Europe wrong?"

"But how, how can it be done if I assent—which I will not do unless compelled? You know, my beloved, my only friend, that we are watched night and day. We cannot fly without our jewels, treasures, necessaries. It cannot be done."

Emma, who knew from the Queen's lips all the particulars of the flight of the unhappy King and Queen of France to Varennes and its miserable failure, recalled here how all was near lost by Marie Antoinette's insistence that Royalty could not flee without little queenly furnitures which attracted suspicion. But *she* was not there to arrange it! That and all else if one were Emma. Her magnificent self-confidence carried her forward.

"Remember Varennes!" the Queen added sadly, her face sinking into utter lassitude as she looked out on the bright Palace gardens.

"Remember, madam, that Her Majesty of France had no Nelson—and may I add, no Emma."

The Queen clasped her hand silently. There was a long pause.

"Madam, Your Majesty has not heard our plans. We

hear almost daily from Nelson. Can you suppose that he cannot carry all the treasures and all the needs of Your Majesty and the Royal Family?"

"If he were at our disposal, yes!" said the Queen languidly. "But why discuss the impossible, chère Miladi? Imagine our possessions conveyed through the Jacobin mob? Imagine ourselves—no, no, we should be torn to pieces. If I could risk it for myself, how could I risk it for my children?"

Emma drew nearer, her quick eyes surveyed the room, the doors, for listeners. The Queen sat by the window, leaning her elbow on it and her chin on her hand; an attitude of utter dejection.

"We have no star. All fails with us," she said. Emma stood, leaning slightly against the window and as if idly gathering a rosebud or two from the lavish growth outside. Her voice was so lowered that it carried to the Queen's ear, and no farther.

"Let us suppose, madam, when we recall the history of your sainted sister the Queen, that Paris had been on the sea. That an English Fleet could have come and gone at its will. That the Admiral had been devoted to Her Majesty's service. That he had had a friend in the Queen's confidence and his own who could act as intelligencer between them. Does Your Majesty think the flight could have succeeded then?"

"Not even then," said the Queen wearily. "The true difficulty lies in conveying so many people, so many possessions between the Palace and the ship. Do you suppose the Jacobin watch sleeps at night?"

"Suppose there had been a secret passage between the Palace and the sea, madam, known only to those who could be trusted. What would Your Majesty say then?"

The Queen fixed her bright haggard eyes on her.

"Is it true?"

Emma nodded, and gathered another rose or two and flung them down to the Royal children below, calling to them and laughing, until the women in attendance looked up at her bright face. Then she resumed, still leaning, so that those below could see her careless attitude. She and the Queen might be discussing the last news of the ballet at San Carlo.

"Madam, the great Nelson would never suggest a plan of which he could not foresee the end. This secret passage exists. It leads from below the Royal apartments to the Molesiglio, the small pier where boats can wait. And Nelson will have his flagship, the *Vanguard,* in waiting, and another vessel, the *Alcmene* for stores. On my knees I assure Your Majesty that there is no danger, if you will leave it fearlessly to him and to me. And from their capital of Palermo, guarded by the British Fleet, the King and Queen can dictate terms to the Jacobins in Naples."

Another long silence. Then the Queen broke into a thunderstorm of tears and sobs.

"I am the most unfortunate of queens, mothers and women. I have nothing left in the world. All has failed."

Emma knelt beside her and ventured to clasp the hand which lay helpless on her knee.

"Madam, you have not lost all. You have life. You have power, and Nelson—who cannot fail you. There was a queen more unfortunate by far—your beloved, unhappy sister of France. Oh, my adorable, unhappy Queen, act while there is yet time, lest your name should be added to hers—as most miserable."

The Queen agreed faintly, exhausted with grief, and the next day retracted her promises. So it went on for days, with Nelson urging and Emma pleading—pleading with reinforcement from Acton—until at last, when Emma was almost worn out herself, the Queen consented to the

gradual removal of the Royal treasures and jewels as a beginning. Possibly, she said, if they were removed out of danger she herself would face the storm in Naples.

Even that was something gained, and Nelson wrote that the logic of events would convince the Queen, for the French power in Italy was gradually drawing southward.

On the fifth of December he returned with the *Vanguard* and *Alcmene* and the great event was at hand. And at last the Queen realized that the time for decision was upon her.

Every day Emma was with her at the Palace. Every day priceless jewels, part of the old heritage of Austria, the new glories of the Neapolitan kingdom, were carefully inventoried, and carried off in her bosom, or the innocent bag she wore in the prevalent fashion secured to her wrist with a slender golden chain. She was perfectly fearless and it is probable she had never enjoyed her position so much in her life. Every day made her of more consequence. She was the pivot on which turned the whole conspiracy of flight.

It must be here owned that the English daughter of the people had the true English adoration of rank and consequence, and that her own experiences had steadily convinced her that rank and power are the indispensables of life. Who had cared for Emma Hart with all her beauty and gifts? Who did not care for my Lady Hamilton, her Excellency, the adored friend of the daughter and mother of sovereigns? The queendom of the Queen became an obsession with her.

She began to believe that the English Fleet, England itself, should pause from all other concerns to safeguard this princess whose favour meant everything to the Ambassadress. The contact vulgarized her mind daily. All was subordinated to the Queen—who in turn was to be guided entirely by her.

The work of packing proceeded in secrecy and haste, and Nelson might have been alarmed if he had seen the mountainous cargo being prepared for his ships. Valuable works of art, treasures small and great, were secured in chests and conveyed into the subterranean passage for embarkation. During the seven nights between the fourteenth and twenty-first, of December, under Emma's own supervision, treasures of almost inestimable value in more than money were carried off. Nelson himself wrote to his commander in chief, Lord St. Vincent:

"Lady Hamilton from this time to the twenty-first, every night received the jewels of the Royal Family, etc., etc., and such clothes as might be necessary for the very large party to embark, to the amount, I am confident, of full two millions, five hundred thousand pounds sterling." There should be no booty left for the Jacobins.

She had, on Nelson's instructions, also warned all the British merchants in Naples that there was a refuge for them on board any of the ships of the Fleet now in the Bay of Naples.

But all was conducted in perfect security, owing to the advantages of the secret passage, and only the vaguest rumours got abroad. Day by day the King and Queen showed themselves on the balcony of the Palace, bowing to the people, calm, smiling, happy. And the mobs dispersed content, and the preparations went on steadily.

The great night came, and still Emma supported the Queen's resolution. Surely a more extraordinary page in history scarcely exists.

It was the twenty-first of December, the *Alcmene* loaded with treasure, waiting off Posilippo; the *Vanguard* prepared for the Royal Family and their crowding attendants, Sir William half frantic at the prospect of abandoning the Palazzo Sessa and the Villa Emma to the plundering of the Jacobins, and Emma heedless of that

and all else in her preoccupation with Nelson and the Queen.

She had vouchsafed a little consideration with Nelson to Sir William's art treasures, the collection of a lifetime, and a part had been embarked on board the *Colossus*, but that was all the thought she could spare from her more pressing duties.

It was a night of storm and rain, possibly the safer on that account, but infinitely terrifying to fair-weather travellers. Marie Caroline had written her last farewell letter from the Palace, to her daughter, the Empress of Austria. "Once on board, God help us!" she wrote. "Saved, but ruined and dishonoured."

Yet no way out, for every hour Naples grew more dangerous. Afterwards she wrote again to the Empress:

"We descended, ten in number, with the utmost secrecy in the dark, without our ladies in waiting, or other attendants. Nelson was our guide."

But even the Empress was not told all the particulars. Emma wrote them to Greville, and it is permissible to imagine the feeling with which the cool, the sedate Greville would read the heights to which his heroine had soared. Emma—Good God!

"On the twenty-first, at ten at night, Lord Nelson, Sir William, mother and self went out to pay a visit, sent all our servants away and ordered supper at home. When they were gone, we set off, walked to our boat, and after two hours went to the *Vanguard*. Lord Nelson then went with armed boats to a secret passage adjoining to the pallace, got up the dark staircase that goes into the Queen's room and with a dark lantern, cutlasses, pistols, etc., brought off every soul, ten in number to the *Vanguard* at ten o'clock. If we had remained to the next day we should all have been imprisoned."

It was done, and as the last boat reached the *Vanguard*, and the Royal fugitives ascended from the tossing waves, pale, terrified, rain-wet and wind-blown, Emma, leaning over the side, to watch their reception, felt her heart beat high with pride and triumph. Glory, even more glorious than her imaginations, was gained. She had saved a King and in so doing had proved her own courage and address to all the world.

The famous flight to Varennes of the unhappy Marie Antoinette and the King of France had failed for want of courage and address like her own. She had not failed. She had triumphantly rescued them and not only themselves but all their family and treasures. No half successes for her. It *could* not have been better accomplished. Nelson had been her instrument; without him it could not have been done; but she had been the brain, the soul of the enterprise. She triumphed, triumphed, as the Queen clasped her in her arms, seasick already, half fainting, and the terrified Royal children clung to her skirts. She led them to their cabins; she provided for every want.

She bestowed Sir William in such comfort as was possible, and had then one word with Nelson on the heaving rain-swept deck.

"Emma, my angel, my wonder; there is none like you—none. Thank God for your courage and wisdom."

She clasped his hand, and he saw her face white and beautiful in the tossing light of a lantern. Then she sped away to her duties, and he to his. But together they had done it—a world's wonder.

CHAPTER XXIII

CIRCE

THERE comes a moment in the fully unfolded maturity of beauty when any change must be for the worse. There is a portrait of Emma about the time of the flight to Palermo which exemplifies this in perfection. It was found in the Palazzo Sessa and represents her seated in a large chair, hands clasped, one of her husband's treasured vases on a table behind her. The beautiful hair is massed and falls in softest tendrils to her brows, there is no smile on the lips and the eyes are half closed as though she were lost in a voluptuous dream—a dream of full summer with the languor of autumn in the air. One sees very clearly in viewing the lovely face why Greville called her his modern-antique and Sir William his Grecian, for there is something of the imperial air which reflects no soul in its beauty. So a Roman lady might sit, indolently watching the sufferings of the amphitheatre, basking in the beams of her own beauty.

This picture may be typical of much that followed the strain and stress of the flight to Palermo. It was a time of experiences which would have broken down any but Emma's happy peasant robustness of health and muscular strength. Such weather fell on the *Vanguard* as even Nelson declared he had never before beheld at sea—a furious and awful gale. Of the refugees, every one was ill, and helpless—the Queen in complete prostration, Royal children, attendants, all alike in miseries of fear and illness. They had no beds, but what Emma's forethought had pro-

vided. But let her describe the scene herself to the astounded Greville, for none can do it better.

"We arrived on Christmas Day at night, after having been near lost, a tempest that Lord Nelson had never seen for thirty years he has been at sea, the like; all our sails torn to pieces, and all the men ready with their axes to cut away the masts. And poor I to attend and keep up the spirits of the Queen, the Princess Royal, three young princesses, a baby six weeks' old, and two young princes, Leopold and Albert; the last, six years old, my favourite, taken with convulsion in the midst of the storm and at seven in the evening of Christmas Day expired in my arms, not a soul to help me, as the few women Her Majesty brought on board were incapable to helping her or the poor Royal children, all their attendants being so frightened and on their knees praying. The King says my mother is an angel. I have been for twelve nights now without closing my eyes. We have left everything at Naples but the vases and best pictures, three houses elegantly furnished, all our horses and our six or seven carriages, I think is enough for the vile French, for we could not get our things off not to betray the Royal family. Nothing can equal the manner we have been received here [Palermo] but *dear*, *dear* Naples we cannot show our love of, for this country is jellous of the other. Sir William and the King are philosophers; nothing affects them, thank God, and we are scolded even for showing proper sensibility. God bless you, my dear sir. Excuse this scrawl."

No doubt Greville hastened to the clubs with his exclusive information for, for many reasons, the world was agog to hear the news from Naples.

It adds a touch of humour to the above that the first

of the philosophers was found by Emma during the dreadful voyage shut up in his cabin and calmly holding a loaded pistol in each hand. "Good God!" said she. "What are you doing, Sir William!"

"I am resolved, my dear, not to die with the guggle-guggle-guggle of salt water in my throat, and therefore directly I feel the ship sinking I am prepared to shoot myself," was Sir William's serene reply.

One may picture the astonished Emma's countenance as she hurried off on her thousand errands.

Palermo shone like the Heavenly Land after all these tragic excitements, and the calm within the shelter of Monte Pellegrino promised in the happy promontory the rest so sorely needed after the desperate voyage across the Tyrrhenian sea. Shaded in its orange groves, with a winter so mild that year that less happy lands might well call it summer, it received the fugitives with a dreamy enervating warmth. In the garden of the house engaged for the Hamiltons was a tangle of flowers wild and cultivated such as even Naples could scarcely equal. Beds of wild mint to yield its aromatic scent when trodden, the rosy wild gladiolus, thyme and asphodel, were everywhere in glorious luxuriance, and by the tiny stream that rippled down to the Fountain of the Sea Nymph, as they called it, the wild oleanders waited with the wild anemones to give their bloom in season. There was an oriental lavishness in the air and the sub-tropical vegetation which corresponded with the Arabic form of the name "Balarmuh" or Palermo. Emma, eager for change, delighted in the strange new scene presented by the town and the lovely Conca d'Oro—the plain of the Golden Shell, with its magnificent fertility. Her mercurial spirits flew up as she stood by the gate with Nelson to watch the Palermitan hawkers with their strange merchandise and bright dark eyes fixed on the lovely Excellenza and the

famous English Admiral. The water-seller with his painted table and syrups stopped to look at her; the sponge-seller, all draped in bobbing sponges, lurked near for an order. But the two were engrossed with their own affairs, and the charm of Sicily, except its flowers and balmy air, passed them by.

They turned into a secluded path, her hand on his arm. He looked inexpressibly worn and wearied. Not even her voice could light the depression that weighed him down, though none but she could understand the reasons public and private that caused it.

"I must have rest or go down," he said in response to her anxious look. "If you did but know the troubles that crowd upon me. St. Vincent returns to England and Keith, who will be my superior, is an arrogant cold-hearted man as dry as dust who may be counted on to misunderstand every one of the reasons that moves you and me. I have written to St. Vincent entreating him to postpone his decision, but the die is cast. Keith will never realize the consequence of our King and Queen to the struggle with the French."

"He must; he shall!" she said in the clear voice that always stirred his blood. "We have never failed yet, and we won't. You mark me! But, Nelson, I have this to say: you are worn out and no wonder. Come and share this house. Live on shore. You can do all that is necessary from here, and then—then we shall be together always."

He knew it was unwise, he knew that in another man he would have condemned it utterly, but the soft air, the dewy eyes mined his resolution and left him weak as water in her hands.

"But Sir William?"

She knew the battle won in his question.

"I will tell you the whole truth," she said seriously. "All the troubles in Naples, the constant entertainments and hospitality, have given Sir William great anxiety about money. He is in debt. We cannot live here as his position obliges us without heavy expense."

He broke in eager as a boy.

"If he would let me halve the expense of the housekeeping—why, Emma, it would be a Godsend to me. Not only the rest and the being with my own heart's friend, but it would save me expense and give me such a home as God knows I never dreamt of. Is it possible that I could have such good fortune? Oh, to hear your voice, to see you moving about the rooms, to have your good old mother's kindliness instead of men, men, men about me always."

She was sure Sir William would agree, she said. He came out presently, walking a little lame with the gout and leaning on his stick, and was at once adopted into the council of three. Why, of course, a most sensible plan, but all "our dear Emma's" suggestions were sensible. It would indeed be a desirable easement to him in money matters. Nelson could very well imagine what both his expenses and losses had been in Naples. It was agreed, and Nelson could scarcely face his own heart's joy coupled with the physical prostration which conspired with it to deliver him into her hands. The least agitation still brought on the cruel pain in his head from the Aboukir wound, and the very sight of the large quiet rooms filled with sweet wandering garden scents was irresistible.

That very day his possessions were moved on shore. The grass never grew under Emma's feet when she was determined, nor under his either, for that matter, and lapped in the security of their compact it never occurred

to Nelson how the Nisbet scene would rise before the minds of his officers who knew the facts, and of many more.

It certainly occurred to Emma, but she had her securities and feared nothing. Ignorant of any public opinion but the Neapolitan, which took such arrangements as a matter of course, and confident in the Queen's support, it never occurred to her that Royal approval might not carry the same face value all over the world as it did in Naples and Palermo. Her Queen was daughter to the greatest empress of history, Maria Theresa; her Queen's daughter was herself Empress of Austria—no statelier lineage in all the world. What woman would not be safe who could call herself the adored friend of such a sovereign? What was a mere Queen Charlotte of England, a petty Mecklenburgher princess by birth, compared to Marie Caroline of Hapsburg? She was to learn the answer to that question very painfully later on.

In connection with it, she forgot also that there were several English ladies in Palermo, great ladies, still swayed by English public opinion, and inclined to look down upon a fugitive queen and her dissolute court, with very different feelings from the reverence with which Emma looked up to the throne. For the first time she was about to pass under the sharp criticism of women.

It was her own fault. Had she been content to remain in the shade all might have been well, but with Nelson living in her house, the Fleet at her command, the officers perpetually coming and going in her hospitalities, and Josiah Nisbet giving his verdict more cautiously but still in no uncertain terms, it was very unlikely that either the compact or the Queen would bear Emma scatheless through the scandals that arose.

And yet again it was her own fault. Where she had been modest, gentle, retiring, now that prosperity and

fame had come upon her, she thrust herself forward. She vaunted Nelson's glories and her own and made them inseparable. She sounded the loud timbrel like Miriam after the passage of the Red Sea, and it was "I" and "he" perpetually. Her songs, chiefly composed by Miss Cornelia Knight and herself, proclaimed his triumphs in clearest soprano for all the world to hear, and Nelson would sit by, his pale face fixed on her in quiet ecstasy, absorbing it all with a kind of quaint innocence which those who understood him, like his faithful Troubridge, pitied, and those who did not, ridiculed.

A pathetic, almost a horrible sight, if she could have been made to see it, but, as Greville had said long ago, Emma had so much taste and all of it so bad, that it was simply impossible to hold her in check unless one mastered the beautiful foolish creature with bit and bridle, and of that art Nelson knew nothing. He believed in her utterly and adored at the feet of his Santa Emma.

Meanwhile the fame of the escape carried her name over all Europe, conjoined with his. Indeed, it deserved renown. Energetic, courageous, she was a shining figure for the popular admiration and certainly the story lost nothing in her telling, or Nelson's or Sir William's.

Congratulations rained in upon them all, from the highest sources. Europe was tired of the massacre of kings and princes, and Emma Hamilton's courageous action was set off by the dark shadows of failure in France and elsewhere. She sunned herself like a tropically splendid blossom palpitating in the ardent sun, and daily her opinion of her own perfections strengthened, fed by the Queen's adulation and gratitude.

Yet all was not peace in the house of the Hamiltons. The strain had told upon Sir William. His talk almost night and day was of his precious treasures of vase and sculpture lost in Naples and in the wreck of the *Colossus*.

His day was virtually done. He told Emma certain home truths which drove her still more ardently into the arms of her worshipper.

"Emma, I am very uneasy at the expense we incur daily. I would have you understand, my love, that it is beyond my means. Ready money is now my need, and the vases I would have sold in England, and on which I counted for a price to set me straight with the world again are lost in the *Colossus*. O God, for the peaceful days before this abominable war set all Europe by the ears! There are times when I would I were done with it all and forever."

"But, Sir William, my good, my excellent friend," says Nelson, intervening, "while I have you cannot and shall not be in any difficulty. What don't I owe to you and her Ladyship that no money can repay? Name your sum and become my debtor, and be very sure you will never be pressed either for interest or principal."

There were the usual protestations, but Nelson, infatuated as he now was, and truly owing the Hamiltons a debt beyond money, insisted, and lent Sir William several thousands, besides paying the cost of upkeep which, when it was inconvenient for Emma, fell wholly on him. This scandal got wind also, and flew over Palermo, disseminating itself throughout the Fleet to Lord Keith, and through and beyond him to England.

Sir William earned the unpleasing name of *le mari complaisant*, and rumour grew more and more venomous daily. Greville was a powerful factor in restraining the worst reports and in propagating others. He had with cool placidity accepted Sir William as a fool from the day he took Emma into the Embassy, and could at least reflect with satisfaction that he had warned him. But he never thought worse of his uncle than this, and defended him in all companies on more grounds than one.

"His kind heart can entertain no suspicions, and

amiable as Lady Hamilton undoubtedly is, her laxity of good nature and all her circumstances rendered her very unfit to take the lead as she is doing with my Lord Nelson's aid," he said coolly to all who discussed the matter with him. "She is—well, what you might expect! And I understand that Nelson is the simplest of men apart from his profession and entirely in her hands. By the way, my Lord, I hear from Palermo that very high play is indulged in there as a variation to other amusements, and that many of the chief houses are merely gambling resorts."

"Does Her Ladyship play high?" asks the delighted listener.

"Why, I am told she has a perfect passion for faro and such games. Certainly my uncle's fortune cannot support high play and therefore I cannot suppose high play. But fair ladies have means of supplying themselves with the sinews of war." So Greville, most skilful to hint a fault and hesitate dislike. He dared no more.

It will easily be seen that no bed of roses was preparing in England for the Hamiltons and Nelson when the time should come for return to the north.

Meanwhile the voluptuous south lapped them in its enervating delights. Nelson loathed, yet clung to it, for her sake. He hated the laxities of the Court. They appeared to reflect their own black shadow on his love for Emma, and make all of an equal turpitude. These dissolute men and wanton women were hateful in his eyes. He would not have her near them if he could keep her away from the pollution. And the gaming—the wasteful senseless gaming; the loud empty laughter. His heart was heavy within him, though for love's sake he followed where she led. Had he been a classical scholar he might have remembered that Sicily was the fabled land of many of the perils of Ulysses. Near here the much-enduring

man had escaped from the devouring Cyclops, and in the soft azure of the sea might still be seen the rocks the monster flung after him in vain. Here the sea-nymph Galatea melted crystalline into the arms of Acis; here Dis ravished Persephone from her disconsolate mother to reign with him as Queen of Shadows and Darkness.

Many warnings were about him, but all unheeded, for Emma filled his soul, and through Emma's bewitchments, her Queen, until the sovereignty of Naples became a clog on the honour of England and day by day he sank deeper into his dream. It narcotized him. The ships came and went: ships that formerly could never have raised anchor but he would have been on the quarterdeck alert and keen; but now they sailed away on their fateful errands and he remained in Palermo.

Napoleon slipped back through the English guard from Egypt and landed in France to pursue his meteoric mischiefs, and still Nelson lingered. Men talked of the Garden of Armida and the enchantress who held him there, but none as yet had the boldness to bring him face to face with the truth.

At last, Lady Nelson, trembling, miserable, noting the change and briefness of his letters, unbelieving his excuse of weariness and want of time—for when had he ever failed her before?—summoned up courage to write once more with the definite proposal that she should join him in Palermo. Every day reports reached her affecting his honour, and blaming herself bitterly for long-delayed action she wrote, tenderly as a wife should write and made her proposition. For when husband and wife are apart time and distance and all the dividing influences of humanity creep in between them, and the stream, narrow at first, widens into a river and then into the boundless sea. The sweet, intoxicating spring had come in Palermo when that letter reached him and rudely recalled him to the

realities of life. His coxswain brought it with a bundle of correspondence less interesting, and when he saw the well-known writing which had once been such a joy in lonely sea-watchings, his heart beat with a cruel quickness—as it had done ever since the long chase to Aboukir.

"Fanny!" he thought, and then, with a quick pang, half anger, half fear. "What does she want?"

He read it, half lying on a long chair in the Sicilian moonlight, by the light of many wax candles which streamed from the gaily lit windows of the house. Inside were green cloth card tables and about them a rabble of officers and the splendidly dressed bare-necked light women of the Neapolitan Court, women whose histories he knew very well from the not too squeamish lip of Emma. Beautiful, but none so beautiful as the queen-rose who sat facing him, with a heap of gold before her and her brilliant loveliness lit by the soft splendour of the wax lights. She wore a dress of cloth of gold falling in supple splendour about her imperial figure and diamonds in her hair and about her neck—the diamonds the lavish queen had heaped upon her to the tune of £30,000; so gossip said, and Nelson knew. She was not looking at him, nor thinking of him at the moment. Her bright eyes were shining with eagerness; she was laughing, talking loudly with the people about her as she plunged her hand into the heap of gold and pushed her stake forward.

His gold! Well, thank God he had it to give her—who could wish to restrict her little harmless excitements; she who could give herself so generously when any great cause called upon her!

He read Fanny's letter again. Fanny in that scene of riot and laughter! Fanny, fresh from the quiet of Round Wood and her English simplicities. Fanny in her silk gown, and the lace folded across her breast, and the serene candour of her dark eyes. Impossible. Did she

recur to him tenderly? Ah, no—as something far, far away, known and loved in another life, another and very different experience; a wandering ghost in this; alien, unwelcome.

He folded the letter and put it in his pocket and watched the scene through the window with absent eyes, almost feeling himself a ghost, as a man does who watches from the night the glow within that takes no heed of him.

How beautiful she was! How beautiful! So she would look if he were dead, the waves tossing over his bones, the sea-wind singing its lonely dirge. No—dear heart!—he did her an injustice, for all her heart was his—his only. He looked where Sir William sat in a corner, half asleep in his chair, the discontented lines stressed about his mouth, and a pang of pity cramped him. Old Mrs. Cadogan had gone off to bed long, long ago. It was near three in the morning. Presently she rose, in her long gold gown, girdled about the bosom in the fashion of the day.

"I've lost. I can't lose any more. That makes five hundred pounds. You go on if you will. Where's his Lordship? I shall go look for him." She pushed her chair aside and the others closed up as eager as ever, and she came out through the long hall, in her satin shoes, and so along the warm dry grass to where he sat under the orange boughs.

Oh, the scent, the scent of the gardens, mingled with the scent of her hair. People must close their windows later in the year lest they die swooning from the overpowering fragrance of blossoms, and that night in the moonlight it was sweet as Eden and sweeter. He himself was a little dazed by it—he remembered that later.

A dead silence outside. It was like looking upon a wild picture of half-drunken riot to see the sight within—the

hot eager faces, the bare-bosomed women clutching at the gold.

"Did we look like that?" she said in a kind of astonishment. "It's better out here. It was hot, hot, in there. I wanted to come out and get cool. It smelt of wine. This smells of flowers. Nelson—how pale you are! What is it? Come out of this glare!"

She gave him her hand, and drew him up, and they wandered from the lurid patch of light flung by the windows out under the cool green boughs, moonlight-silvered, with gulfs of dark and light beneath them along the garden paths, and the first faint rustle of a bird disturbed in the boughs by their passage. Quiet, cool quiet and a great peace, and sweetness like the breath of a goddess about them in dark night. Before very long it would be dawn and the wan edge of light surrender the secret of Mongibello, dreaming in the warm darkness.

"You're disturbed and I know it," she said very softly at last. "There's nothing passes in your mind but I read it like a book. What is it? A letter from Keith?"

"No, not Keith. At least I have only read one letter. It's from her, Emma."

"Her?" He could hear the quick-taken breath, the apprehension in her voice. Surely that should have revealed their own danger to them. There was no longer talk of the feminine *tria juncta in uno*—three joined in one—where Lady Nelson was concerned. Emma had grown to hate her very name. She was a malignant presence lurking in the dark ready to strike. And who was she after all? There was nothing in Emma's past to imbue her with any respect for a mere church ceremony, except in her own case and Sir William's, which naturally did not affect any other.

"What does she want?" she asked at length, as a low hanging bough shook a little spray of scented dew into

her fair bosom. Nelson gathered the offending blossom and laid it there all fresh and cool, against the glowing warmth.

"She wants to join me here or at Naples."

"Do you want her?" The voice was cold and distant—with suppressed pain, he thought.

"You know," he said, and that was all. She turned upon him passionately in the scented dark.

"Nelson, if she came I should die—I should die. She would never understand. How could she? She would come between us. You would never love me any more."

"I shall love you until I die. You are my breath, my life, my soul to me. My own heart's angel."

"But you love her best."

"Don't ask me—I don't know what I do," he said hoarsely. "There are things best left unsaid. I love you. I never knew what love was until I saw you—until this minute, I think."

They had drawn near the fountain of the sea nymph, half buried in maidenhair and violets. Its soft warble was like the voice of quiet. A few crystal moonlight drops fell from the jar she held in her cold marble hand. How many lovers had her down-dropped eyes seen by her waters in the warm Sicilian nights? But never a pair like these—never before and never again. It was too much for him. Everything in nature conspired to help her, and fought against his resolution. The world faded before him, and only her face remained star-sweet against the dark.

Perhaps he would never get home, never again see his offended Fanny? Had he not done enough, toiled enough by land and sea to earn his reward? Peace and love. He asked no more; and both, both were passionately within reach at the moment. Better forget it all and dream away their lives in some such paradise as this forgotten and for-

getting. He put his arm about her, and hid his face on the warm whiteness of her breast. Her own face, lovely and indistinct in moonlight and shadow, blotted out Heaven and earth for him and left only its own intolerable sweetness. He ached for her. The cruel, the unslaked thirst was upon him.

The marble nymph was silent in her green gloom, only the water dripping, dripping eternally from her jar, and a white cloud veiling the moon.

He that is without sin among you—

They were together until the faint gold rim showed beyond the sea and the mountain rose coldly white against the dawn. The revellers were still pushing the money frantically about when they returned, but Sir William had vanished, exhausted, and the air of the great room was foul and close.

Next day Nelson wrote to Fanny:

"You would by February have seen how unpleasant it would have been had you followed any advice which carried you from England to a wandering sailor. I could, if you had come, only have struck my flag and carried you back again, for it would have been impossible to set up an establishment at either Naples or Palermo."

The die was cast. He had chosen with Faust: "Evil be thou my good." God and Emma was his heart's cry, against Fanny and the man-made laws that love mocks at. But here again he salved his conscience. Fanny should have all but love, every respect, every honour due from man to wife should be hers. All but the one thing she craved. Yet Nelson might have been moved had he seen the tears falling like rain over that letter. Even Emma might have pitied.

His other letters afforded him small comfort also. Trou-

bridge, his honest true-hearted friend, his right-hand captain, had also gathered up his courage to write.

"Pardon me, my Lord. It is my sincere esteem for you that makes me mention it. I know you can have no pleasure sitting up all night at cards; why, then, sacrifice your health, comfort, purse, ease, everything, to the customs of a country where your stay cannot be long? Your Lordship is a stranger to half that happens, or the talk it occasions; if you knew what your friends feel for you, I am sure you would cut all the nocturnal parties. The gambling of the people of Palermo is openly talked of everywhere. I beseech your Lordship leave off. I wish my pen could tell you my feelings. Lady H—'s character will suffer, nothing can prevent people from talking. A gambling woman in the eye of an Englishman is lost. You will be surprised when I tell you I hear in all companies the sums won and lost on a card in Sir William's house. It furnishes matter for a letter constantly both to Minorca, Naples, Messina, etc., and finally England. I trust your Lordship will pardon me; it is the sincere esteem I have for you that makes me risk your displeasure."

But Nelson could not pardon in the cold searching dawn after that enchanted night. Something sickened and revolted within him—that others should watch, should guess. He flung it furiously down and would not answer it. His feeling to Troubridge was never the same again.

The Admiralty in London also was growing uneasily suspicious. They much misliked his journey in the *Foudroyant* with the Hamiltons to Naples to punish the Neapolitan King's rebels and pave the way for setting him on his throne again. They could not be made to

sympathize with Nelson's execution of Caracciolo, the traitor Neapolitan Admiral; with Emma, the Queen's emissary, in the background suspiciously all the time. They could not be made to comprehend that it was a British Admiral's business to punish a foreign king's traitors for him. They could not be made to comprehend the advantages of a beautiful ambassadress's presence on board a British man-of-war in war-time, more especially as the scandal concerning her grew in volume daily.

Nor could the unsympathetic Admiralty be made to comprehend why in such stirring times it was necessary that Nelson should linger at Palermo. And furthermore, the Foreign Office began to bestir itself and ominous rumblings were heard. Their Ambassador appeared to be devoting himself far more to Neapolitan interests than to British. If Sir William Hamilton had grown so old that he was in the hands of his wife—and such a wife!—it was certainly time that inquiry should be made in that little paradise of Palermo.

Nelson sank lower and lower into depression of mind and body. The joyous wellspring of energy was dried up in him. He was ill—ill at ease. He drew up a codicil to his will that should tell all the world, if he fell, how he idealized this woman who was the world's butt.

"I give and bequeath to my dear friend Emma Hamilton, wife of the Right Hon. Sir William Hamilton, a nearly round box set with diamonds said to have been sent me by the mother of the Grand Signior, which I request she will accept and never part from as a token of regard and respect for her very eminent virtues (for she, the said Emma Hamilton, possesses them all to such a degree that it would be doing her injustice was any particular one to be mentioned) from her faithful and affectionate friend."

No, he would not be ashamed. He would glory in their love. And she fed every flame with the oil of her own passionate nature. He detested the French, therefore she must loathe them more. He saw her kiss a Turkish sword encrusted with valiant French blood, and did not rebuke her. She urged him on in what she believed to be the cause of God and her Queen, in that vindictive hatred of the enemy which, with herself, is the only accusation that malice itself dare hurl against Nelson.

Greville's cold insight would have understood what Nelson's could not; that, unrestrained, flattered, adored, the baser elements of her character were coming inevitably into play and that she would most certainly injure not only herself but all who trusted her unless rudely and violently checked as he had checked her often. But then Greville knew her past utterly; Nelson only what she chose to tell him and with her own extenuations. Greville knew the plebeian ignorance which underlay all her experience. He would have used her but never trusted her: Nelson trusted her and was used by her, blinded by the kind heart, the gallant courage, which never failed her at the worst. Greville had made her. Nelson was to unmake her and reduce her to her original elements again—the wild uneducated hoyden of Up Park, with a difference. She was like a vine, trained, pruned, fruit-bearing, in Greville's prudent hands. She was the same plant, untrained, untended in Nelson's, bearing bitter, unripened, wild grapes only.

Lord Keith wrote coldly to him, commanding his presence at the final destruction of the French-Egyptian Fleet. He ordered that Palermo no longer should be the rendezvous of the British Fleet, and that Syracuse should be substituted. Nelson received it furiously as censure on his lingering at Palermo. He sent his *Foudroyant* to help in the blockade of Malta, but himself he would not

go. He would stay; he was in weak health; he would return to England.

Troubridge once more wrote passionately:

"Will your Lordship come and hoist your flag in the *Culloden?* Rely on everything I can do to make it pleasant. Your friends absolutely, so far as they dare, insist on your staying to sign the capitulation. Be on your guard. I see a change in language since Lord Keith was here."

And yet, to the grief of all his friends, the last surviving of the French Fleet in Aboukir Bay surrendered to Nelson's ship, but with Nelson himself in the Garden of Armida. Troubridge had entreated in vain.

Nelson was so angry with himself that his anger overflowed on others. He wrote passionately to Lord Spencer at the Admiralty that his spirit was broken by the indignities inflicted on him and he must have rest, and orders were sent to Lord Keith that if Nelson's health rendered him unfit for duty he must return to England. Lord Spencer wrote again coldly and sensibly to Nelson:

"It is by no means my wish or intention to call you away from service, but having observed that you have been under the necessity of quitting the blockade of Malta on account of your health, it appears to me much more advisable for you to come home than to be obliged to remain inactive at Palermo. I believe I am joined in this opinion by all your friends here that you will be more likely to recover your health and strength in England than in an inactive situation at a foreign court, however pleasing the respect and gratitude shown to you for your services may be. I trust you will take in good part what I have taken the liberty to write to you as a friend."

The hint was terribly plain and could not be less, for the scandal of Palermo was raging in England now. Nelson was furious; Emma's rage unrestrained. Their noble services to be so misunderstood, so under-valued. Good God, what ingratitude? That was her daily cry, and every evening she fled to the arms of her Queen, and they wept together over the black hearts of men.

Lord Minto, who knew and understood Nelson better than most, wrote in extenuation of the infatuation that all the world now ridiculed. The pitiable side of it was that Emma's past, and indeed her present, made it far more a subject of ridicule than of anything else. A mere light woman! A woman who had—and then followed the black catalogue. That Nelson should trifle with his honour for such as she! But Minto wrote more wisely, more kindly.

"I have letters from Nelson and Lady Hamilton. It does not seem clear whether he will go home. He will, at least, I hope, take Malta first. He does not seem at all conscious of the sort of discredit he has fallen into or the cause of it, for he still writes, not wisely, about Lady Hamilton and all that. But it is hard to condemn and ill-use a hero, as he is in his own element, for being foolish about a woman who has art enough to make fools of many wiser than an admiral."

True enough, and "the woman" meanwhile was planning on her own account to meet these strokes of fate. Nelson should linger until she was sure of Sir William's position with the English Government. Sir William should apply for leave. Then, at least, they could return with Nelson, and he would not be exposed to the artifices of a wife most anxious to regain his love. None knew better than Emma that a wife with the world behind her and the

sympathy of high and low is a dangerous antagonist for even the most heart-holding mistress.

Sir William, good easy man, needing rest, was glad enough that his restless Emma felt the need of it also, and gladly applied for leave, but was startled indeed to find when it was courteously granted that the Foreign Office had decided he should not return and had swiftly appointed his successor, one who would not be so malleable to the blandishments of the Neapolitan Queen. The world was wearied of the Palermitan celebrations, orgies, and mutual-admiration societies and a sterner régime was to be inaugurated.

The indignant Keith would not even grant a battleship to convey the party, accompanied by Her Majesty of the Two Sicilies, to England. The play was played out. Lady Hamilton had had command of the Fleet long enough, said Keith with dry sarcasm. She must be contented with the *Foudroyant* to take her as far as Leghorn. The rest of the journey to England must be done by land. Her reign was over.

So ended the Neapolitan chapter of Emma's life and she must needs put it behind her and continue her journey home with a secret in her bosom not long to be hidden, and the meeting with Lady Nelson ahead like a fear made visible. She had reached her zenith in Naples. In Palermo the sun had begun to slope westward and the shadows to lengthen.

As for Nelson, he left it loaded with favours from the Neapolitan King, Duke of Bronte in Sicily, but sore, sore at heart.

CHAPTER XXIV

DESCENT

That journey home, in spite of all the splendours which his own and Emma's renown and the Queen's company occasioned, was a nightmare to Nelson. He was utterly besotted on her; he could neither escape from her enchantments nor will to, but as yet his conscience was not wholly silenced, nor the orientation of a lifetime completely changed. The process of deterioration, which could never touch either his genius or his patriotism, had begun in other and subtler nerves of his character but the disease had not as yet sufficiently spread to numb his recognition of what was due to his wife, and she had become an agony to him. How to meet her, what to hope, he could not tell. He who had been able some years before to say, fearless of contradiction, "There is not one action in my life but what is honourable" could say it no longer. Glory must cover the loss of honour; a tinsel covering to a man's own inner judgment. Others might make excuses, but he knew very well that when evil and good lay before him he had chosen evilly and must pay the price of that choice. Not indeed in losses that the world could appraise, but in things sacred, secret, on which he must be dumb for ever. What he could not know was that slowly but steadily his perception of what was noble and generous would dim and fail under this creeping paralysis of the soul and that the day was near when he was to treat his wife with such a cruelty as would have filled him with indignant shame if he had heard of it in any other case than his own.

Slowly and steadily the toils strengthened about him. From the day that Emma, pale and weeping, told him the secret that must ruin them both with their home ties and with the world if it could not be hidden, he surrendered all hope of retreat for either of them, and clung to her as one lost soul may cling to another in hell.

That mood passed, and he defied his own convictions. Love was not hell—it was Heaven. It was of God, and here was the proof. His wife had never given him a child. His home was barren of that visible blessing of Heaven. This woman whom he loved, was, in sorrow, fear and secrecy, to fill that cruel emptiness with the sound of a child's voice, the light of its eyes. What did he not owe her for the agony endured for his sake, and what is a child but God's blessing visible to man? Surely to such a passion as his it was the sign of approval, the recognition of a marriage sacred beyond all the laws of man. Such love made its own laws, and Heaven recognized them if man ignored them.

It was not that he ever sat down to analyze his problems. That was not Nelson's way. He saw them in flashes of insight and took them as revelations, and shaped his life and his words in accordance with them. It followed from these that Emma should be perfect to be worthy of the Divine approval on their union. Therefore she was perfect. That his own services to his country were so great that they lifted him above the common judgments of right and wrong. Therefore he might safely despise them. Yet he was miserable—miserable.

But as he grew more and more confident of his own deserts he deteriorated, exactly in the same measure as Emma under the same strain, only he had more to lose and farther to fall than she. He became vainer, more boastful, impatient of anything that could be construed as less than fulsome admiration, suspicious of his old com-

rades. The word glory was sweeter to him than the word honour. It is significant of much that when he quotes Shakespeare's noble lines that if it be a sin to covet honour "I am the most offending soul alive," he substitutes the word glory for Shakespeare's "honour," apparently unconsciously. Yet glory is the world's voice, and honour the man's own secret and inestimable riches in the sight of the Eternal.

And Emma too fell. From the day of her marriage she had resolved to put certain things behind her forever. She had received a trust. She would justify it with every effort of mind and body. She would crown her husband's choice with glory. Glory again! And where had it led her? Into a slough deeper and more miry than any she had known in the evil experiences of her young life. Unable to face the truth, she too hardened her heart against all the world.

Many records survive of that journey back through a flattering Europe to the England where they hoped and believed that glory would cover all shortcomings. She grew more and more flamboyant and boastful. Even the Queen, Marie Caroline, began to feel that one might pay too dear for help from a woman of the people, and the comments of some of the Austrian nobles and of her own family in Vienna were like a breath of cold outer air upon a hothouse friendship. She rewarded Emma with recognition, with splendid gifts, with a latest diamond necklace wrought in ciphers of all the Royal children and locks of their hair. She offered her a pension of a £1000 a year, she made protestations of warmest and eternal gratitude. Could a queen do more?

"She adores me!" Emma protested to Nelson and Sir William. "There is nothing she would not do for me. I am the sister of her soul. Neither time nor distance can part us."

"No doubt, my love," Sir William answered. "She owes everything to your generous exertions, but our dear Nelson will agree with me that a former Ambassadress of England can accept no pension from a foreign court."

"Impossible, and Emma would be the last to wish it," Nelson agreed. Emma, who had not seen this objection perhaps with the same finality, agreed in haste also. There were many things she could not see and therefore blinded Nelson to—for instance, that this blaring, flaring journey across Europe in one party was sheer madness for their hopes in England.

If there is one thing valued in England it is a decent reserve in speech and action—an almost stoic restraint. There are very few sins unpardonable if introduced by perfect good taste, and there the Nelson party sinned daily and flagrantly. Nelson touched the imagination still, but with pity. Hear Lady Minto, writing from Vienna:

"I don't think him altered in the least. He has the same shock head and the same honest simple manners; but he is devoted to 'Emma'; he thinks her quite an *angel* and talks of her as such to her face and behind her back, and she leads him about like a keeper with a bear. She must sit by him at dinner to cut his meat, and he carries her pocket-handkerchief. He is a gig from ribands, orders, and stars, but just the same with us as ever he was."

They were sorry—that was the truth of it. But none could deliver him from himself, and Emma triumphed exceedingly. It is interesting to wonder what she would have done could she have known the opinion of the world. Probably nothing otherwise than she did in her immense self-glorification. She, a Lady of the Grand Cross of

Malta, given her, alone of Englishwomen, by His Majesty, the Great White Czar!

Lord Fitzharris wrote to his father:

"Lord Nelson and the Hamiltons dined here the other day. It is really disgusting to see her with him. Lady Hamilton is without exception the most coarse, ill-mannered, disagreeable woman I ever met with. The Princess [Esterhazy] had with great kindness got a number of musicians and the famous Haydn to play, knowing Lady H. was fond of music. Instead of attending to them she sat down to the faro table and played Nelson's cards for him and won between £300 and £400. In short, I could not disguise my feelings and joined in the general abuse of her."

Indeed, it was difficult for any Englishman to forgive what he conceived to be the public degradation of the national hero. Greville would have understood perfectly, would have said he had predicted all this years ago if Emma were not held strictly in hand. He had, on one occasion now long, long past, said to Sir William, shaping his fine lips delicately in the utterance of an unpleasant word: "It is impossible, my dear Hamilton, to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." He would have reiterated this with his own small smile if he had seen the incidents of that journey.

Yet Emma, with her secret at her heart, wished to conciliate women's opinion as far as possible, if she had but known how to deal with English women of birth and breeding. She did her best; she thrust her friendship on Mrs. St. George, a lady of quality, who pushed it coolly back upon her. She also viewed the party with the contempt that was a foreshadowing of the English attitude. She set down her reflections in her diary:

"Sir William is old and infirm, all admiration of his wife and never spoke to-day but to applaud her. Miss Cornelia Knight seems the decided flatterer of the Two and never opens her mouth but to show forth their praise, and Mrs. Cadogan is—what one might expect. After dinner, we had several songs in honour of Lord Nelson, written by Miss Knight and sung by Lady H. She puffs the incense full in his face but he receives it with pleasure, and snuffs it up very cordially. She loads me with all the marks of friendship at first sight. Still she does not gain upon me. Mr. Elliott says, 'She will captivate the Prince of Wales, whose mind is as vulgar as her own, and play a great part in England.' "—A judgment at one time likely enough to be verified.

Yet behind all this glare and glitter what would the commentators have said if they could have seen into the minds of the two chief actors?

There were moments when Emma trembled for her empire over Nelson in thinking of the wife reinforced by English opinion. Nothing but her beautiful face in the glass, and her enormous courage sustained her. If she could but have taken the Queen to England in her train! What suspicions could resist the countenance of a queen? The austere Charlotte herself must surrender before such a battle array. But alas, that was impossible. The tearful farewell must be said in Vienna and Marie Caroline be left to the support of her daughter, the Empress. But it was much on her mind. She felt her way cautiously with Mrs. St. George.

"One takes it for granted that presentation at a court like that of Naples, and my intimate friendship with the Queen will ensure my being received at Windsor," she said, one day in Dresden.

Instantly the young and charming widow was bristling with carefully concealed caution.

"Why, madam, an ex-ambassadress is generally certain of that on the merits of her position."

Lady Hamilton hesitated a little. So much was known that she could not afford to ignore the difficulties altogether.

"Oh, but, my dearest madam, your friendship emboldens me to ask your opinion, and I know well that none is better, moving in the high circles you are accustomed to. What is expected? Have you heard anything one way or another?"

Mrs. St. George, none too pleased with this attribution of friendship and thinking the question in the worst possible taste, drew herself up perceptibly.

"Indeed, madam, I have heard nothing. These matters which affect Her Majesty's good pleasure are not discussed in society. I really can offer no opinion."

But still Emma persisted: "Indeed, I think 'tis impossible Queen Charlotte should refuse an honour bestowed daily by a queen so much her superior in birth and—"

"I fear, madam, I must insist that the Queen of England has no superior—indeed, no equal," says the fair Mrs. St. George, slightly tossing her pretty head. "I must only attribute it to your long absence from England that you should think otherwise."

"No equal!" cries Emma, flushing over neck and bosom. "The daughter of the Empress Maria Theresa, the mother of the present Empress, the wife—"

"Madam, you and I are English subjects," says the young lady with an air of finality.

"But Sir William is the foster brother of King George. His great services—my own—"

"Indeed, I can't doubt," interrupts the pretty widow again, "that their Majesties are perfectly capable of noticing and rewarding any service. Her Majesty is known all the world over for her propriety of judgment."

Emma bursts into a laugh a little too loud and forced for the occasion.

"Well, for my part, I hear the Court is as dull as ditch-water! I care little if she receives me or no. I had much sooner she would settle half Sir William's pension on me. Fair words butter no parsnips."

If it be permissible to say of a lady of birth that she slightly sniffed, it may be said of Mrs. St. George. Her disgust was almost visible. She certainly has left it on record.

Yet one may pity the poor woman who had all at stake. Sir William was not in the position of the ordinary husband. He knew her past, and if he should know her present what had she to expect? And Greville, the cool, sardonic Greville, was waiting their arrival in England, and certainly it could not be his interest that all should be confidence and security between her and his uncle.

When she was alone with Nelson, she dwelt on that. It haunted her.

"My own, own Nelson, I wish, I often wish, we had all never resolved to return to England," she said one day in the hotel at Hamburg, with the English problems looming nearer and nearer. "We were safer there. 'Tis impossible I should say how I dread Greville. I have been honest with you, honest as the day, and you know 'tis his interest to make mischief between me and Sir William. And if he suspects—"

She looked up at him with trembling lips. She had been honest up to a certain point, but not entirely. There had been no mention of "the little Emma." Nelson's rapture of fatherhood, his belief that this marvellous experience to be was as new to her as to him, had shut her lips there, and unspeakably she dreaded Greville on that score also. She had always feared him even when she loved him. She feared him doubly now.

"My own dear angel, you shall not, must not fear," said Nelson tenderly. "Our blessed happy secret shall be our secret always. Yet supposing the very worst—supposing Sir William divorced you—if I found you alone and deserted under a hedge it would be my pride to marry you. You should be my own Duchess of Bronte, and a fig for them all!"

"Your wife?" she reminded him, her head lying wearily back on her chair. But it was not that which made a divorce seem to her the most impossible of things. It was the terrible fear of her own past and Greville's intimate knowledge of it. He would be a witness. She could hear his cold voice with its perfect enunciation disclosing secret after secret she trembled to think of now. There were things which in spite of Nelson's infatuation might well give pause to his judgment. She dared not even consider such a possibility.

"Would I ruin you in the eyes of the world, my hero? Not for the sake of all the agony your poor Emma must suffer. No—I will fight it through as I have fought through many a difficulty. With your love to help me, I don't fear. If that failed me—"

She made an expressive pause, her beautiful mouth quivering. He knelt and put his arm about her, resting his head on her bosom.

"The sun can as soon fail from the sky. Every day you are more and more to me. I glory in it. I thank God for it. My wife wrote to me desiring to meet me on landing, and I wrote to her that I judged it would be best to meet in London. I did this, for your sake, my own heart's beloved, for I thought it would be easier for you to meet her there in some way yourself can choose. But rest assured that in that matter, as in all else, your own dear Nelson lives but to do your will. You are the best, noblest, most beautiful woman in all the world. You have

no equal—you never have had—and all shall be as you will."

She caressed his hair tenderly with her soft hand. Indeed, she was touched.

"Then I want my Nelson, the dear husband of my heart, to be very, very wise for both our sakes. You must not quarrel with your wife. However malicious and angry she may be, we must not let her put us in the wrong. Remember all I have to hide, and help me, help me. I want to win her friendship—that will be the greatest safety I can have, at all events until this is over. I will do anything in the world to please her—swallow any insult."

"You shall swallow none!" says Nelson, with his grand air. "If she dares insult you—"

She put her hand on his mouth.

"No, no. You must be patient for my sake. Think of all we have at stake. I would crawl to her feet to carry things off. And you must not be too much with us at first. No, you must not. We must deny ourselves. Remember you are the world's hero as well as your Emma's and every eye will be upon you. Of course I know that will carry us through in the end for a man who has served his country like you may do what he will. I am not afraid of our reception in England. It is only your wife. If we can win her, all is won and safe. And Greville. I must please him every way I can, and he must never suspect anything."

But for all her exhortations she dreaded Nelson's impetuosity. She would willingly have had him on a foreign station until the crisis was over, much as she needed his help. There were points where she feared that she herself could not restrain him, and one of them was his wife. What was that cold, unknown woman doing—what thinking? She was measuring herself this time against a force

she had never fought before. She could glean really nothing of her from Nelson. Men cannot describe women to each other—the equation of sex forbids it. Fanny remained a silent sphinx.

They embarked at Hamburg in a storm which might have prefigured much if they had taken it as an omen. Sir William, terribly shaken and suffering, could only groan aloud that he wished they had never left Naples. This cursed war and its consequences were ruining him in purse and health alike. Emma left his groanings to seek shelter by Nelson, for it seemed at one time as if all her doubts and fears might be settled in a way that would make no appeal to human judgment needful. She found him pale and serious in the little cabin, a letter in his hand, his mind evidently abstracted from the yelling wind and rolling waves. She came and caught his arm for safety, flung against him by the rolling of the ship, and he drew her down beside him.

"It reminds me of the *Vanguard* and the voyage to Palermo!" he said. "But what does that matter? Storms blow themselves out but there are things—"

He stopped, and put the letter in her hand. She knew the writing—Fanny's. She read it eagerly: "I have this instant received a note from Admiral Young, who tells me if I can send him a letter for you in an hour he will send it, therefore I have only time to say I have had the pleasure of receiving two letters from you. I can with safety put my hand on my heart and say it has been my study to please and make you happy, and I still flatter myself we shall meet before very long. I feel most sensibly all your kindnesses to my dear son, and I hope he will add much to our comfort. Our good father has been in good spirits ever since we heard from you; indeed my spirits were quite worn out, the time had been so long. I thank God for the preservation of my dear husband, and your

recent success at Malta. The taking of the *Généreux* seems to give great spirits to all. God bless you, my dear husband, and grant us a happy meeting." So, with an affectionate prefix and ending, the letter stood.

"It is the answer to mine forbidding her to join me in Palermo," he said, and there was something in his voice that shot a pang of dread to her heart. That quiet reference to his capturing the French ship—what man of sense could compare it with her own violent outpourings of delight at his successes, she thought. And yet—there was a calm tone of settled, steadfast affection, of wifely ownership, of the family ties—"our good father"—that wounded Emma at every syllable and woke the worst in her. It seemed to rise superior above all she could say or do; the wife, the happy wife who had no secrets, whose position all must do reverence to, while she—she was nothing but a hindrance, a hidden shame, the blot on an honour that nothing else could have spotted. It seemed to set Lady Nelson apart and beyond her. She handed it coldly back.

"A wife who can take your glories so coldly is what I can't understand. I should have thought—but no matter! If it moves you—if you think she is worthy of your greatness—"

He understood the note of pain in her voice, and clasped her hand in his. She could feel its feverish heat; the nervous thrill in it.

"She is my wife no longer. It is you—my own Emma, the mother of my child. But you have a generous soul, you must know from that letter she has heard the base stories that were scattered from Palermo, and she wants to assure me that neither those nor my refusing to let her come out have made any difference. She is a woman I must respect to my last day for I have never known a spot in her—no, not one. If I could keep her as a friend

I would, but the world is so impossible—impossible to what it can't understand or value. Still, would my Emma value her Nelson, if he could cast such a woman off without a pang? God knows I dread that meeting in London, and to wound her tender heart!"

"Tender?" she cried. "I should have said *not* tender—hard. See that cold, cold letter, and you coming home with such honours as was never seen in the world. No—don't mistake her. She will value the world's good opinion. She won't throw away all for you, as I've done with all the dangers and ruin likely before me. The one is love; the other—I don't know what to call it."

"Do you think I don't know that?" he said, his nervous face quivering and lips twitching. "If you asked me I would never see her again. I am all yours—body and soul until death us do part. But—she is a good woman."

"And I am not good? Oh, Nelson, is this the reward of such love as was never known?"

"You are my saint, my guardian angel. There is not a thought of my heart inconstant to you. She is nothing—nothing! See!"

He tore the letter into tiny fragments, unclosed the porthole by an inch, and as the wind screamed in at it, he pushed his fingers through, and sent the fragments flying on the gale. He closed it again and returned to his seat by Emma.

"*That* for her!" he said. Even to Emma in her triumph there was something shocking in the incident. Love! To what could it drive a man? Yet she was glad at heart.

They landed in a storm so terrible that only Nelson's advice and entreaties compelled the pilot to bow to his better judgment, and surely the sight of the English welcome was reassuring, for all Yarmouth had turned out to meet the returning hero. Emma too was not forgotten. Amid the music and rejoicings a ring of fine topaz set in

brilliants was bestowed upon her by the enthusiastic welcomers. Sir William was quietly in the background, used indeed by this time to that effacement. Speeches, sentiments, toasts, abounded. Her smiles, bows, exuberance, fanned the popular welcome into roaring flame. Never was such a scene.

"And London will beat it!" she said, triumphant, as they entered the coach for the journey. "We are safe, safe in England. It will be Naples, Palermo, only more, because it's our own dear country."

But Nelson was silent. His fears were greater than his hopes. Yet Emma was always right and surely her charms would conquer England as they had done Italy. On her he relied. But that welcome was unfortunate for it made her more self-confident, less inclined to be conciliatory than ever before. She was certain they could have it all their own way.

CHAPTER XXV

FANNY

It was a still Sunday afternoon with a November mist clinging like a cold breath to London, daylight still but the lights showing little starry points in the streets below when Fanny and his old father waited for Nelson at Nerot's Hotel in St. James's.

She was a young woman of thirty-six, "not beautiful but eminently pleasing," as a friend described her, with clear hazel eyes matching abundant hair arranged low over her forehead, almost hiding the brown, finely-marked eyebrows. The charm of her face was the mouth, set in with the pressure of a hinted dimple at each corner and very ready to break into a smile to match the latent smile in her eyes. Her figure was slight and well-formed, under a plain dress of brown satin a little staid in its design for her years, especially with the broad falling collar of Maltese lace and sleeves to match, which Nelson had sent her from the Mediterranean, and which certainly would be more suitable ten years hence. The sleeves half hid really beautiful little hands with a quick nervous gesture about them when she was eager, which the Nelson daughters considered foreign and affected.

But Frances Nelson cared very little about things of that order. She had never gone much into society, was rather alarmed than otherwise by the daring, low-bosomed fashions of the day, imported from the license of France, and was better pleased to escape notice than to attract it. Besides, except for Nelson's visits to England, her life had been mostly passed in the village of Burnham Thorpe,

as the companion of Nelson's old father: a dull life for a young woman, and one which his daughters, Mrs. Matcham and Mrs. Bolton, were very well pleased to commit to the daughter-in-law.

She really had very little in common with the Nelsons. She had been married extremely young to her first husband, Dr. Nisbet, and was left a widow next year with a child—Josiah. But her life in the Leeward Islands and her few travels with Nelson had given her at least a glimpse of the world outside England, and she was apt to think the family narrow and ignorant. She thought them also excitable and exaggerated in their emotions, which was true enough in its way, and they returned the compliment by styling her cold, reserved, uninteresting. They could not imagine what Horatio had seen in a widow, who had only £4000 "to her fortune" when all was said and done.

Still, it was owned that Fanny was sensible and useful. She had not the sensibility they could admire, was not liable like themselves to interesting heart spasms on the slightest excitement, took things quietly and composedly, and might even be suspected of airs of superiority to those who had sensitive feelings and displayed them. Yet their father would have been a problem without her and certainly none of the sons or their wives coveted his company. Perhaps it was on the whole better she was so staid and quiet. A livelier young woman might have been urgent for more amusement, and old Mr. Nelson was attached to her.

She was certainly reserved. It was extraordinarily difficult for her to express what she felt, and in that respect she was a contrast indeed to her husband, whose emotions, like his family's, were always more or less in the extreme. For the rest, she seemed to have little initiative, agreed with his opinions gently, and was compliant almost to a

fault. His father was exceedingly fond of her and thought her the ideal wife for Horatio, who had agreed in that opinion formerly. In short, a woman of whom it would be difficult to predict her action in really disturbing circumstances.

It was characteristic of her reserve that while all the family were whispering together with clustered heads of the stories which had come in from Naples and Palermo she never uttered a word on the subject. Mrs. Bolton, Mrs. Matcham, both sailed as near the wind as they dared when they visited their father, but Fanny was silent. Not meaningly and bodingly silent, but calmly. It was as if she had heard nothing. For the life of them the two bustling women could not make her out, and went away, discussing the "hussy" at Naples, and lamenting Fanny's stupidity, who, if she had written "strongly" to Horatio would only have been doing her duty as a wife and might have made some impression. In reality, the quiet woman whose hazel eyes were so reticent had heard more than any of them and lived in an agony of fear and jealous pain. A Nelson would have stormed about the room, stormed in speech and on paper and decreased the pressure somehow by this kind of exhalation. She could not. She endured. She made little tentatives, small hints, in her letters to him which she prayed he might take advantage of for explanation and, when he never did, was helpless and could say no more. She crimsoned even when alone at the mere thought of upbraiding her husband with any liking for another woman.

But she watched his letters, lynx-eyed for any signs of change, and found plenty. "My dearest Fanny," "My beloved wife," became "My dear Fanny," and her "most loving and affectionate husband" became "affectionate" and from that zero, as it seemed to her, the thermometer never rose again.

And now at last, after long years, they were to meet, and in spite of her calm exterior she was trembling in every limb as if with ague, and could hardly answer the old man's restless questions for the dryness in her throat.

"I wonder what he'll look like, Fanny. I wonder if there will be much change in him."

"Much change, I should think, sir. Time does not stand still."

"But his true heart can never change. He was always the best of sons."

"The very best, father. You could not have desired a better."

"No, and that's the index of a man's character—Does he consider his parents? If that's right, all the rest follows. Ah, you're a fortunate woman, Fanny. He has given you a great position. What, did I hear a coach down below?"

"No, father, don't move. I will warn you in time. Stay, let me arrange your hair. I want him to see you at your best."

She produced a little pocket-comb, and put back the long white locks on his forehead.

"How cold your hands are. Make up the fire. The room is cheerless compared to my study at home," he said, shivering.

It was cheerless and full of fog. The heavy red damask curtains were looped up in formal folds, the chairs set in line against the flock-papered walls, a stiff armchair on either side of the smouldering fire. The frost seemed to have entered into her soul. Her teeth were almost chattering with cold and fear.

Hark! Far off a cheer! The cheering of a crowd—London shouting its welcome to an honoured guest. She went quietly to the window and looked out on the waiting, silent crowds beneath.

"It might be—no, nothing yet. I'll watch."

She stood leaning there while the old man warmed his hands over the now flaming fire.

The cheering grew and grew. It swelled louder, louder. It was as though all the lesser voices of London were drowned in that one unloosing of the heart of a nation. It was grand, terrifying, like the roar of a lion in his deserts. Her face grew deadly pale as she listened.

And now, suddenly and as if at a signal, the crowds beneath broke forth into cheering also. The room vibrated to it, the very air shook forth with the sound of men's voices mingled with the shriller cries of women. She turned, wordless, and beckoned to his father, who joined her at the window.

The crowd, denser now, had parted and made a narrow lane through the midst. They stood packed on either side, cheering, fluttering handkerchiefs and scarfs—anything!—and turning the corner, came a carriage, with four horses—open.

In the back seat was her husband in full uniform, with a constellation of stars and gold medals on his breast. Beside him, a beautiful woman in plumed hat and furred pelisse, bowing, smiling right and left. In the seat before them a thin distinguished old man taking no active part, but looking on with a kind of detached amusement and pleasure.

The carriage moved very slowly. She could see it all in lamplight and daylight, like a bright picture.

"Does he look well, Fanny? Can you see him? My eyes are dim."

"Very well, sir. He is in uniform. He has friends with him."

Her voice was as quiet as when she read aloud in the parsonage study. Her heart seemed to have ceased beating.

Now the carriage was drawing up at the hotel door. The manager, the staff, were waiting on the steps as if for Royalty. Sir William descended first, then Nelson, and together they aided Lady Hamilton's graceful descent, the magnificent folds of fur falling about her. Fanny drew back from the window and stood by the fire.

Five, ten minutes passed. Of course there would be greetings downstairs, questions, answers. Then feet in the passage outside; a voice—"This way, my Lord," and the door opened. He came in—if her life depended upon it she could not have moved a limb. Her very agitation froze her, and it was the old man who got at him first and clasped his hand, and put a feeble arm about his shoulders and kissed him on the cheek. He did not even see her in the darkening shadows of the room.

"My dear, dear father!" he said. Oh, well-remembered voice! Oh, pain and joy unspeakable! "It's home to see you again. Is Fanny at Burnham Thorpe?"

She heard the quick startle in his tone, and then she moved into the firelight at last.

"I'm here, my dear husband."

That was all. There were a million things she wanted to say, pleadings, loving words, passionate entreaties. But how could she? His father was there. They should have met alone, it was cruel, cruel that they had not, and yet even if they had, what could she have said? Nothing, nothing. When the heart is too full it chokes on its own utterances.

He took her hand and kissed her cheek. It was a moment of agonizing embarrassment to her. His father grasped his shoulder and led him to a chair by the fire and poured out all the questions she would have asked if she had dared. But, indeed, her heart was near to bursting. She had been forbidden to meet him, but that bold beautiful woman had shared all the honours of his return

and was in London also now, waiting her time. All the Palermitan stories crowded on her mind. Would not one think that a wife who had never offended had more claim than that cold kiss?

She asked him in her soft voice whether he was well, whether he had any pain in what was left of his arm?—the pathetic empty sleeve wrung her heart. She had gathered up the little scraps of family news to tell him; the Boltons, the Matchams, his brothers, William and Maurice, would be coming up next day. Yes, they were all well, all full of eagerness to see him. She did her best, God knows, but what can a woman do so cruelly hampered? It all sounded stiff and unnatural. He took it for anger and answered with cold punctuality.

The lights must be lit; he wished to see how his father looked; and presently there was the mild illumination of wax candles. She felt rather than saw him stealing a furtive glance at her.

"You look paler and thinner. I trust I see you in good health," he said.

She hurriedly reassured him. "And you too?" she added wistfully.

"My constitution is never a strong one and I have had many cares and anxieties, not to mention dangers, of late years. The Aboukir wound gives me trouble still at times. But I owe everything to the unwearied goodness of my friends, Sir William and Lady Hamilton. But for them I should not be alive to greet you and my father, and whatever you feel for me you should certainly repay in gratitude to them. They have put up at this hotel until they can secure a house, and as I shall be much engaged at the Admiralty, it is my hope that you will show Lady Hamilton every attention possible. I shall take it as a kindness to myself. You owe her much for her goodness to Josiah also."

"I will do my best," her pale lips shaped. Josiah! His letters and angry comments on the intimacy which all the world talked of had been a sword in her heart. If Nelson did but know!—but she could not tell him.

"I wrote at your wish and invited them to stay at Round Wood. I hope the letter met you at Yarmouth," she said timidly.

"Certainly, and I thought it very proper. I handed it to Lady Hamilton. I have asked them to dine with us presently. You and my father cannot too soon meet friends to whom I owe so much."

Soon indeed! Then even the first meeting was to be broken in upon with suffering! She recalled other returns while he and his father talked on. How eagerly he had clasped her in his arms; how much there had been to hear and tell; what sympathy, eager understanding in it all—and the dear, dear nights when they had been alone; and she lay in his arms and could not sleep for joy to hear his quiet breathing again. But no one could have guessed these thoughts from her quiet face fixed on the fire as she sat listening and very silent now. Of course he thought her angry and sullen; of course he fiercely resented it. She looked older, too, her face seemed dimmed and dull after the brilliant roseate beauty his eyes had feasted on, his lips had tasted.

"Well, we must prepare for dinner!" he said at last, getting up. "I trust my dear father will enjoy meeting two of the most eminent men and women in the world. I ordered dinner as I came up, Fanny. Which is my room?"

"My—" She moved forward silently and led the way to a large and London-dingy bedroom adjoining the sitting-room. He looked with disfavour at the great draped four-poster with its drab curtains and tester.

"I can't sleep in that catafalque!" he said. "I want fresh air. Make them put me up a camp bed near the

door, or better still in the room adjoining, for I am often disturbed at night, and you look as if you needed your sleep. Better give the order now."

She rang the bell and gave it, and his "traps," as he called them, were put in the room which opened, hotel-fashion, into hers. For the first time she recovered herself a little and carried her head higher. That insult, for so she took it, fired even her gentleness. He left the door open between them and talked while she changed her dress for dinner.

Indeed she had little to change it to. She had supposed it would be as usual but a day or two in London, and had not made very extensive preparations. But she had a black satin with lace and a bandeau of rows of seed-pearl for her hair, and a chain set with small pearls which had been a gift from his prize money. She dressed herself to the best advantage and looked in the muslin-draped glass and thought she would pass. More she could not feel; and after all, what use to compete with a beauty of European notoriety? She did not ask his opinion when her toilette was finished as she had been accustomed to do.

They went together into the sitting-room when they were ready. It was now brilliant with lights, and a well-spread table, and old Mr. Nelson in the ceremonious evening dress of a clergyman of the old school, and Nelson in silk stockings and orders, and obsequious waiters hovering about and making conversation impossible.

It seemed to Fanny that she could not collect her thoughts—it was dream-like, she had not a word to say.

And now the door opened with a flourish—"Sir William and Lady Hamilton. Miss Knight."

Habit and breeding will pull a woman together when nothing else will, and Fanny in her desperate need moved

forward composedly, with her quiet curtsey to either lady.

Emma trailed in in the gorgeous gold gown of Palermo, too splendid by far for so simple an occasion, girdled below her full bosom with a girdle in the Directory fashion, set with diamonds.

The bandeau which bound her luxuriant curls was of diamonds also, and about her neck the magnificent diamond necklace lately presented by Marie Caroline with the ciphers of the Royal children. Even a plain woman must have glowed in such a dress set off with such a galaxy of jewels but with her velvet skin of lilies and roses, her bright hair, and the crimson bow of her lips she was a figure of dazzling beauty to strike the coldest into amazement. It was a theatrical entry, theatrically contrived with all her dramatic instinct brought to bear, and for the moment it succeeded. Fanny's heart sank like lead. What hope, what help against such charms? She was an illumination in the room—the very light all gathered about her, and seemed to be reflected in her. Miss Cornelia Knight was an agreeable, brown-complexioned woman in purple—a well-chosen foil for the other's brilliance. Indeed, Emma's heart exulted as she greeted with all her exuberance the quiet Fanny in her "dowdy" dress, for so she classed it. If *that* was what she had been dreading!—one may finish the sentence on a note of triumph. She took possession of the party. She showered offers of attention on Fanny. Had she been presented yet on the peerage? No? Then she herself would undertake the presentation after her own. She quite expected that one of Sir William's Hamilton cousins would present her. And nothing would be easier to arrange.

Dinner. Oh, might she show her Ladyship exactly how Lord Nelson liked his meat cut up? She had done it all the way back from Palermo but naturally must now

surrender the pleasure to his good wife. Fanny, on the contrary, surrendered it to her—it was so obviously the wish—and her own place was at the head of the table with Sir William in attendance.

He revolted her, though after a very different fashion. His manners were perfect, polished, easy, even her inexperience could tell that, but his stories of the Neapolitan Court! His smiling references to the Queen's amours as something quite in the order of things and to be expected! His hints of French corruption and the manners of the now celebrated Josephine, the wife of the Corsican adventurer! Good heavens, what people had Nelson fallen amongst? What a society was it where such subjects could be discussed! She did her best to reply with courtesy, and Sir William found her a dull young woman and betook himself to the conversation between Miss Knight and Mr. Nelson, throwing in comments on her spirited story of the flight to Palermo, and the still more marvellous history of the return of the *Foudroyant* to Naples, and the avenging of the King of the Two Sicilies on his rebels, including the hanging of his traitor Admiral Caracciolo, as Miss Knight called him.

"The treacherous animal, he well deserved his fate!" said Sir William, enjoying his glass of the fashionable pink champagne. "And it is not the least of the glories of your glorious husband, madam, that he had the pleasure of ordering his ignominious death. He desired to be shot like a gentleman but my Lord ordered him hanged as the dog he was."

Again Fanny was silent. She had heard through naval friends in London of the strong censure expressed at the Admiralty, and indeed at Court, on Nelson's action in thus condemning a foreign admiral. The rights of it she could not know and dared not judge, but it appeared in any case no subject for exultation. Emma's keen eye and

ear were on the talk at that end of the table, and she intervened.

"Indeed, I am certain her Ladyship must have rejoiced with the rest of us when she heard that such a traitor had met with his reward. Oh, madam, did you but know my adorable Queen you would share in the joy that filled us when those rebels were punished by your husband's noble courage. There is not one admiral in a thousand would have took it in his hands like him."

Fanny could not but reply: "I am sure my husband did all he thought just and proper."

She got that out, flushing, and how cold and inadequate it sounded! But she was not the woman to rejoice over corpses dangling at the yard-arm even if she had understood the subject better than she did. Her answer fell into a silence, and then Miss Knight resumed her praises and Sir William commented, and the hostess sat isolated, outshone and forgotten.

Emma was in her most aggressive mood of boastful praise of Nelson's and her own doings. She had meant to be entirely conciliatory to Lady Nelson, and only achieved condescension. An unreasonable anger possessed her, as if the woman had no business to exist. Certainly she feared her no more. She could understand her at a glance and foresee her rôle. She would raise no objection to the friendship; she would be tame, obedient, easily hoodwinked; a convenient shield until happier days should come. No, all was well. Really, almost a negligible quantity. She thanked her graciously for her invitation to Round Wood. Later on, she quite hoped it might be possible to accept, but at present she and Sir William were so overwhelmed with invitations from Royalty downwards that dear Lady Nelson would understand it was not possible, and so forth.

But Fanny's quiet eyes were noting everything. Emma

was not behind Sir William and far beyond Nelson in the refilling of her glass with the pink champagne which Fanny ignored. Her large commanding figure promised corpulence later on. She spoke too loudly, laughed too often, her speech had no refinement—could not have. What can eradicate origins? She puffed the incense full in Nelson's face, as another observer had said, and Fanny's heart saddened, for he had always had too much of the Nelson exaggeration in speech and feeling himself to satisfy her wholly. Even before this she would have prayed him to leave boasting as well as boarding to others if she had dared, and now his loud voice and overemphasis frightened her.

That dinner was Purgatory to her. It was full of interest to Mr. Nelson, who found all the enthusiasm and excitements highly to his taste, and so expressed himself when the guests had departed with loud hopes of a speedy reunion.

"Indeed, we have had a breath of the great world tonight!" says he, rubbing his hands. "I declare, Horatio, I know not when I have been so interested. Sir William is indeed a man of the first fashion, and her Ladyship a woman of unsurpassable beauty. What did my quiet Fanny think? Her opinion is always valuable."

She saw Nelson's eye furtively on her while she answered.

"No one can dispute her beauty, sir. It exceeds the pictures of her I have seen exhibited. But, if my opinion is asked, I think they are personages who move in a very different world from the simple one to which we are accustomed."

"They move in *my* world," Nelson interrupted angrily. "And as I have raised you to that world by my successes I shall hope you will do me no discredit with my friends. Much of what you rejoice in now you owe to the Hamil-

tons, for without them it could not have been accomplished."

"I hope indeed we shall both of us have cause to rejoice!" she said, strangling a sob in her throat. "You must pardon me if as yet I am a little strange to such society and such stories as Sir William Hamilton gave me of Naples."

He turned away, then coldly: "I'm dead tired after the journey, and to-morrow will be a busy day."

He kissed her in the great dingy bedroom and she saw him no more that night. Not only that day but the next were busy beyond all words. He must visit the Admiralty, and returned chagrined by his reception, The truth was the Palermitan stories had poisoned all authoritative sources in England, and his arrival with the Hamiltons, following on the ill-judged journey across Europe, had disgusted many. Public opinion was slowly but surely ranking itself on Fanny's side, and she, poor bewildered woman, did not know what to do with it.

Nelson had returned all-glorious, but the air was chill after the tropical praise of the Mediterranean. Lord Spencer of the Admiralty had been his friend, but now—he came back furious and flung himself into a chair, before Fanny, who was quietly knitting.

"The Lady of the Admiralty was as cool as ice to me," he said, with sarcasm that ill hid his annoyance. "Lady Spencer, forsooth! I care little enough for it. Let them get another admiral to fight their battles when they want one! Yet she wrote to me after the Nile a letter that almost overwhelmed me with praise. Women—women!—the most changeable frivolous creatures on all God's earth. I know but one who never changes; whose warm candid soul is always the same. Oh, if all were like that, what a world it would be! Do you drive out with Lady Hamilton to-day?"

"Certainly, if you wish it!" she said, with her eyes on her knitting. She, who knew the stories afloat, thought their association ill-judged, but what could she say?

"Naturally I wish it, while gratitude is of any consequence, and Heaven knows that you and all the world might learn from her kind heart and accomplishments which I have never seen equalled."

Silence.

"I go to Court to-morrow," he said after a while, "and in the evening the Hamiltons dine with us again."

He went and returned indignant at his reception by the King. Fanny asked him kindly if all had satisfied him, and had a short "No" for her pains and then a diatribe against Royal ingratitude as contrasted with the Neapolitan condescensions. She heard later that day from a source she could trust that His Majesty merely asked after Nelson's health, and without waiting for an answer turned away and talked with another officer in great good humour. It wrung her heart, and the more so because she knew the cause but too well. It had been very different with the King formerly. She could remember hearing from the faithful Davison how His Majesty had spoken of her husband "with the tenderness of a father," and now, now, crowned with the glories of Teneriffe, St. Vincent, the Nile, and so much more, he was coldly put aside, and —good God!—for what a woman! She revolved her duty in an agony—to speak or not to speak? To refuse to be seen with her, or go meekly on according to Nelson's orders? She could not yet decide.

The town rang with stories of the pair. Nelson and Lady Hamilton had been unable to believe that the adulation of Naples and Palermo would not cover everything. They could not be made to realize that it made their case worse.

The sincere Troubridge visited Miss Cornelia Knight and warned her of the storm about to break. She had taken refuge with Mrs. Cadogan but he assured her that was not sufficient.

"I assure you, madam, that no lady who wishes to escape general censure will associate herself with any connection of Lady Hamilton. I owe your mother a kindness which I must repay in this fashion. Lord Nelson's noble character and glorious career may bear him scatheless, and I trust it will, but I understand the word has gone forth against Lady Hamilton."

Miss Knight packed up her goods incontinent and fled the same day to shelter under the wing of Mrs. Nepean, wife of the secretary of the Admiralty. Emma tossed her head and grew even louder and more scornful of such fair-weather friends.

Indeed, the poor woman had her own terrible battle to fight, and though she feared Lady Nelson no more, she might well fear her own courage. She dared not leave London, for every eye would fasten on her every movement. She dared not leave Sir William, for that she had never done since their marriage and it must provoke his inevitable suspicion. Her battle must be fought with only her mother's help, under the roof of the house they had now taken in Piccadilly, and in horrible secrecy and dread —a desperate throw for safety.

Let the initial error be granted, and much that appears detestable in her conduct becomes comprehensible. How could she give her cause away without ruining Nelson? How could she hide her secret but by clinging to Lady Nelson, to every person or thing which could help her to the assumption of innocence? And that she hurt her cause by her loud boastings and triumphings and public protestations of the innocence of her friendship for

Nelson, and the bond between her and his wife, her breeding made her as incapable of understanding as though she belonged to another planet.

She grew more blatant and preposterous daily in her frantic efforts to conquer opinion, and little knew how Lady Nelson's mute face of sorrow, dragged in her wake, spoke against her trumpet-tongued with all who had hearts to feel. As for Nelson, Beckford summed it up in a phrase: "She can make him believe anything she chooses." She could—and did.

It was one evening when she was out, dazzling in her diamonds at the opera and Sir William was at home with a cold, that Greville came to pay one of his quiet visits to his uncle. He was still a bachelor. His ill success with Miss Middleton had disinclined him to expose himself to any more rebuffs, and a comfortable minor Court appointment really suited him far better than a wife. Especially with his views on the succession to Sir William's property. He found him lying by the fire on a couch drawn up and comfortably screened against draughts, a catalogue in his hand.

"Rejoice with me, my dear Greville. The very best of good news! I have heard to-day that many of my precious cases were saved from the wreck of the *Colossus* —some of the vases and pictures I most prized."

Greville was sincerely warm in his congratulations. That, indeed, was a recovery that appealed both to his taste and his sense of money value.

"Yes, and it is my intention to have a sale of some of the objects. Not enough to crowd the market—something very choice and select. I know Beckford and others will be keen to purchase."

"Certainly. But can you bring yourself to part with them, my dear Hamilton?"

"Must. I need the money. I am £2000 in debt to Nelson for expenses at Palermo, not to mention other and heavier debts. I am sorry to say—for I can be frank with you—that a spirit of extravagance possesses Emma which alarms me very much. And then there were our fearful losses in the Jacobin riot in Naples for which the Government ought certainly to compensate me. And my pension is not satisfactorily settled by any means."

"True," said Greville thoughtfully. "Still, it is a painful necessity. And the pictures?"

"I shall sell three portraits of Emma. I have so many, and they are attractive enough to fetch a large price."

"No doubt." Greville's mind was turning to the Edgware Row days and Emma's tearful anxiety if the stipulated allowance was exceeded by a shilling. She had certainly changed since then.

"I sometimes think you have never understood her," he said. "Controlled, she has a fine character. Uncontrolled, a danger to herself and others."

"True, but you are aware that as a man grows to my age his only desire is for peace. It is worth giving way in trifles to secure it."

"In trifles, yes. But what are trifles?"

"Most things," says Sir William with his little cynical smile. "Nothing really matters so much as we are apt to suppose."

There was a pause. Greville could not echo that sentiment. There were things which mattered much to him personally which were bound up with Hamilton's affairs.

"I have sometimes wondered," he said slowly, "whether you are aware of the talk flying round the town about Emma's intimacy with Nelson? It is accusing her in no way to allude to it, for we both know what talk is worth. Still, it is there."

Sir William's smile did not relax.

"Jacobin rumours from Naples and Palermo. Nelson is all that is honourable."

"No doubt. But I assure you the scandal has reached an alarming height, and she is not meeting it wisely. This constant persecution of Lady Nelson—for so it is called—sets all sympathy against her."

"Emma must pursue her own methods," Sir William said coolly. "I have long ceased to be responsible for her actions. If I were to check her it would make storms in the house to which I am quite unequal. You remember her temper of old, Greville."

"The devil of a temper, but I broke it."

"I cannot, and I assure you it has gained strength with years. No—I am not for opposing Emma."

"But, my dear Hamilton, do I understand that these rumours give you no pain? I do but my duty in telling you that you are represented as completely hoodwinked and under hers and Nelson's influence. Heaven forbid I should say it is true, but that is the notion freely expressed."

"And how many men in London are ridiculed in the same way?"

He reckoned off on his delicate fingers a score of names in the highest positions, which the present recorder, for the peace of great families, reserves in his own discretion.

"I am really content to suffer in such good company," he concluded placidly. "There is an ignorance, my dear Greville, which is as protective as the shell of the tortoise. I have full confidence in Emma's high principles and the extraordinary discretion of Nelson. And if I had not, I should act just the same. For God's sake, imagine me as the wronged hero of a trial for crim. con. What have I ever done to deserve the suspicion of being such a fool as to incur it, and after such a marriage as mine? Con-

sider my marriage, and say no more. I repeat that I have the usual confidence in my wife and my friend."

Greville understood him perfectly. Indeed, all the old man said was true, and it jumped entirely with Greville's own convictions. These things happened, and one met them in the way which gave one least trouble. There was no more to be said. Yet he asked one question.

"My dear Hamilton, our friendship is of so many years' standing that I venture to ask: Do these rumours trouble you? Are you discomposed or annoyed?"

"Never less!" said Sir William, laying the delicate veined hand on his catalogue. "*These* are the matters which really interest me. The world is receding—I never minded its opinion very greatly; I mind it not at all now. I should like to see you and a few other congenial friends frequently, and I have no objection to telling you that my will is made, and I have taken what I conceive to be the proper attitude toward my poor Emma's extravagance. I have no doubt that her friendship with Nelson will have pecuniary results. Nor can I object to telling you that you are not only my executor but my residuary legatee."

Greville's thanks were warm and heart-felt. He took his cue perfectly from that moment. Certainly Sir William should be troubled with no rumours and no scandals from him. He should have the classic peace he desired.

Emma would have rejoiced in her safety from one of her blackest dreads. Yet even she might have thought the price of safety high. She certainly had reason to do so later.

The gods sell everything at a fair price.

CHAPTER XXVI

PARTING

There is a most absolute and splendid justice in the remorseless sequence of cause and effect, and those who play at dice with angry gods cannot win.

Nelson had cause to know that truth in the days that followed. He was losing, losing steadily. There were moments of frantic joy buried like jewels in a rubble of fears, anxieties and disappointments. It would always be right next day, but never was. Emma and he would always find perfect bliss—to-morrow. But that to-morrow was the rainbow in the field beyond and to-day he was face to face with Emma's troubles and Fanny's tragedy.

He knew it was a tragedy and denied it fiercely to himself and to Emma. She was cold, dull, heartless. She did not care a rap. What comfort could a man find in a pale, silent creature like that? He wanted warmth and colour; he wanted tender flattery. Was it his fault if she had changed in his last absence? He wanted to be friends provided she would fall in joyfully with all his views regarding Emma, and she would not. She obeyed his wishes like a slave. They were seldom alone; he contrived that; but when they were, little was said and less answered.

But—there is justice. Though Lady Nelson made no plea for herself, the world made it for her. There was deep indignation against the treatment she was receiving. Queen Charlotte entirely refused to recognize Emma, and this although Sir William made his best interest with

the King, his foster brother. The third George could be a veritable farmer George for bluffness when he so pleased, and he told Sir William to his face that he might very well remember how much he had disapproved the marriage, how he had assured him at the time that whatever the Neapolitan Court might do, the English Court would hold to its rules; though he himself would be always welcome. And to Emma's rage and Nelson's infinite disgust, Sir William serenely attended the next Court.

"It would make a talk if I did not, and at my age I cannot be troubled," he said, with a smile which had a family resemblance to Greville's.

"It would trouble *me* to attend without my wife," Nelson said, a little too bluntly.

"Yet I have not seen you take her," Sir William rejoined with the same fine smile, and the conversation dropped.

And the more public opinion set against him, the more defiant Nelson grew. In his own words, he was fixed as Fate, and daily more bound to the woman whose ordeal was drawing nearer.

"It is not," said Sir William Hotham, a typical man about town discoursing at his club, "that London has turned suddenly moral or that any sensible person cares a damn about Nelson's chastity. It's his confounded vanity that leads him to brandish himself and the woman in the face of society and think every one is to swallow it because he is the great Lord Nelson. And such a woman! As for that poor wife of his—the least a man can do is to hide that sort of weakness. It's damned unjustifiable to wound her feelings publicly as he does, when there isn't a man or woman alive but knows she's one of the best good women that ever stepped. Look at him now, going off to Fonthill with the Hamiltons for Christmas and leaving her alone here in town, and he

only lately home from sea! I declare I can barely stand it, though God knows it's no concern of mine."

"The mischief is," said another man, in the little group at the club, "that Nelson is no rake. If he were, he would manage his affairs with much better breeding and a deal more consideration for that poor wife of his. He's as infatuated as a fool about the Hamilton woman as if he were a boy of sixteen in love for the first time—which is exactly the case. It's his damned innocence that's more than half the trouble."

But pity or no pity, the climax was nearly upon Fanny now. Nothing could stave it off. She spent her solitary Christmas sitting at the window of their lodgings in Arlington Street and wondering whether in all broad London there was any heart so heavy as hers. Not in London perhaps, but certainly in the midst of all the gaiety at Beckford's palace of Fonthill. Nelson was sick in spirit—and the more mortally offended with his wife because he knew that in ways he could not explain to himself she was the cause of his unrest—even in Emma's company and the noisy gaieties of Beckford's meretricious Fonthill; all of which suited her Ladyship exceedingly well.

They returned to London, and Fanny had her orders to attend the Hamiltons to the opera and show herself in the box with them. Emma made a point of that, for the time was not now far distant when Lady Nelson's countenance might be vital to her in Sir William's and the world's eyes. Fanny pleaded fatigue, but soon saw there was no alternative. She put on her quiet black satin and sat in the box a little behind the beautiful glittering Emma in her purple spangled satin with the *cachemire* draping her fair shoulders. There were very few eyes in the house which were not turned upon that box, with their owners speculating on the drama it held. Nelson

sat in front, brilliant in stars and orders as Emma in jewels. Sir William went placidly to sleep.

Half-way through the performance, in the very midst of the great soprano aria, "Non dirmi addio," where the prima donna swoons into the arms of the distracted tenor, Emma followed her example and fainted quietly away. Nelson and her husband sprang together to her assistance. Fanny sat death-still, not moving a finger. It was as if something had snapped in her brain with the result of an extraordinary lucidity in all her perceptions. She saw, she understood, and her own hitherto obtuseness filled her with shame and self-disgust. No wonder that Nelson, that every one despised her. She had carried obedience into caricature and made a show of herself for all London. She rose and walked out of the box without a look in Emma's direction.

Presently the two men followed, supporting Emma between them. She was recovering but still pale as death, her eyes showing but as a blue line under heavy lids. They had dragged some cushions out of the box and made a kind of couch for her in the passage, which was quite empty.

"Have you no smelling salts?" Nelson said imperiously. He was stooping over the sufferer with Sir William. There was no direct answer.

"I am going home," Fanny said. She pulled her cloak about her and turned her back on the group without another word. She walked swiftly along the passage.

"My dear Nelson, pray attend to your wife. I will see to Emma. See, she is recovering quickly. Lady Nelson cannot return alone." So said Sir William, realizing the potentialities of the situation and anxious to avoid them. An attendant came hurrying up with salts, and Nelson strode away after his wife with a heart full of anger which was but pain reversed.

He overtook her half-way down the stairs, and calling a carriage, put her in in dead silence, and followed her. Not a word was said on the way to Arlington Street, the wheels jolting over the cobbles, and the dim lamps shining and darkening as they passed. Fanny opened her own door at the end, and got out and went upstairs. She knew she must face it now, and a kind of desperate resolution came to her. Things could not last like this. A change there must be and who could tell it might not be for the better? Certainly nothing could be worse.

Nelson followed her and shut the door of the sitting-room. He looked ill and pale in his fine coat with its stars; even less fit to face the ordeal than she. But he moved straight up to the attack and laid his ship alongside the enemy, as he always did at sea. She sat down, quite unable to stand.

"I wish to know why you publicly insulted Lady Hamilton? Why, when she fainted, did you not show her the common humanity of help as one woman to another? Why did you turn your back on her and walk out of the box?"

Her teeth were chattering with terror. She could hardly control her voice. There could be only one thing more dreadful than this scene—to endure as she had been enduring. But she got some words out at last.

"If you ask me that question I must answer. But you had better not."

His tone was like tempered steel: "I ask it."

She raised herself in her chair, supporting her two hands on the arms, and looked into his eyes.

"It is terrible to me to say it, but I cannot screen your mistress and the mother to be of your child."

There was an awful silence. His face was livid. Every particle of colour had fallen away even from his lips. So they faced each other, the ruins of their life between them.

For a minute or more neither spoke—nor could. Then he rallied.

"How you dare make that base and foul attack on a woman better than yourself, God only knows. I can only suppose your mind is poisoned through and through by the Jacobin lies. Never while I live will I forgive you. And this to the husband to whom you owe everything!"

A sudden courage fired her at this most unjust speech.

"When my husband withdraws his love and gives it to another, what else he has given me is worthless in my eyes. And as to stories—I go by your own conduct. Have I had a kind word from you since you returned? Have we lived as husband and wife? Have I not been dragged about with a woman whose shameful past made her an unfit companion for me in any case?"

"Be silent," he said, with low concentrated fury.

"I cannot be silent. I have always obeyed you and my one prayer is to do so again and forever. Oh, my husband, my dear, dear husband; we were happy once. I implore and entreat you let us be happy again. Put her away and come back to me. She is ruining you in the eyes of men. On all sides are stories of her worthlessness and your misplaced belief in her. That is the cause of all the coldness that wounds you. I love you. Come back to me and forget this most miserable thing and let us be happy again."

She spread her hands out in the quick gesture he knew so well. The tears were thick in her eyes but did not overflow. Even then her reserve stood in her way. Even to herself she seemed strained and cold. She wanted to kneel before him and cling about him and tell him all her love, but could not. Oh, for a word, a sign of love from him and then the frost would break up and dissolve in a rain of passionate tears and kisses.

He turned to the window for a minute and stood looking out on the dim lights as if taking a moment to think, and then turned back again.

"I won't insult the woman you speak of by defending her from your vile attacks. She is utterly beyond your malice; the truest, bravest heart in the world. If you wanted love from me you should have met my friend as your friend and taken her to your heart as I have. She was willing to love you, as she wrote you more than once, but you would have nothing but your own poor jealousy. Well, have it! Keep it! I tell you here and now that you have so acted that one hair of her head is more to me than all you have and are, and that though most unfortunately I must live with you for her sake, it shall never again be as husband and wife. And if you injure her in word or deed it shall be at your peril."

She got up from her chair steadied by these dreadful words and stood holding by it for a moment. Then she spoke in a choking whisper.

"What must the passion be that can make a man like you speak so to the wife he has loved and trusted? I have no more to say. God judge between us."

She went quietly to the door that led to her bedroom and passed through and he heard the key turn. If even then she had faltered and shown some sign of weakness he might have—no, not relented, for Emma possessed him too strongly for that!—but have thought of her more tenderly. But her reserve stood her in ill stead, and moreover he knew he was in the wrong, and he who has done the wrong never pardons. He would have left the house forever then but for the injury to Emma's reputation at that crisis.

He sat down by the table and buried his face in his arm and thought of Emma and yearned for her and for the comfort she only could give him. Indeed, his love

for her, misplaced, guilty, is none the less one of the rememberable passions of the world, incalculable to himself and in its results.

When he had a little recovered, he went out into the street and to Piccadilly that he might judge by the light in her window whether she had returned and was still suffering or could sleep. Up and down in the cold rain he walked, his eyes fixed on that square of light, and at last was rewarded more than once by seeing her figure flit across it with long dishevelled hair, and Mrs. Cadogan evidently in attendance. That was the best he could hope, and then he went back and crept into his small bedroom and never closed his eyes any more than did his wife; and so those two miserable hearts were side by side, united yet apart in a very different suffering, for the few last nights left them.

They were not to be many. In his tactlessness and cruel persistence, hardened by the slights shown almost everywhere to Emma, he scarcely opened his mouth at home but to praise her. He had a faint hope of convincing Fanny that all was innocent between them, and that therefore the subject was not one he need avoid, but still greater was the desire to insist on the virtues and greatness of soul which all the world must realize. His brother Maurice came up to London and, shocked at the state of affairs and the talk which greeted him on every side, implored Nelson to be reconciled with his wife, even if it were only for the sake of Lady Hamilton's reputation, which he himself privately considered past praying for. Nelson's answer was an ultimatum.

"I am willing to live on friendly terms with Fanny but will never desert a woman to whom I owe so much and insult her by what my desertion would imply. Fanny must accept her as an honoured friend."

And Fanny could only reply that there might be some

hope if she could be allowed to ignore the woman. That surely was not too much to ask. It was much too much, as it proved. There was a deadlock.

It added to her agony that Nelson's sisters, Mrs. Bolton and Mrs. Matcham, had struck up the most cordial friendship with the woman whose hand, as they well perceived, could dispense all the favours they could hope from their famous brother, and the elder brother William, the needy clergyman, was not long in imitating them. His letters to Emma, sickening with adulation, often contained such gentle reminders as the following:

"I am told there are two or three very old lives, prebends of Canterbury, in the Minister's gift, near £600 a year, and good houses." And then she would set Nelson, much against his taste, to beg the authorities for favours which he hated to ask.

She was flattered in the extreme by this family recognition and too free and easy to care to trace its wellspring very closely—all was confidence and sympathy on that side.

The situation was impossible and the end came quickly. They were breakfasting in Arlington Street, a friend, Nelson's solicitor Hazlewood, with them, and Nelson, as usual, was showing forth the praises of "dear Lady Hamilton." The breaking-point of Fanny's long suffering was reached, as often happens, by a thing she had silently borne hundreds of times before. She rose at last and said passionately:

"I am sick, sick, of hearing of dear Lady Hamilton. Indeed you must choose between us. I can endure no more."

Nelson was shocked from the family vehemence into calm, for there was finality in her face.

"Take care what you say. I love you sincerely, but I cannot forget my obligations to Lady Hamilton or

speak of her otherwise than with affection and admiration."

There was a dead pause, the guest staring in embarrassment at the tablecloth, afraid to look at either.

The poor woman who had reason enough to estimate that love at its true value, tried to speak and could not—her mind was made up, and that was all. She tried to utter it and failed. She crept from the room and left the house, hoping against hope, praying that the terrible break would stir him to shame and repentance. It never did.

He went off in ghastly anxiety to Emma, afraid lest he had ruined all their plans. But she received the news with her gayest courage.

"After all, what does it matter? I can be seen about with your sisters now, and that's really better in some ways for they don't love your wife and they'll be furious at her walking off like that. Trust them to talk! Besides, as my own Nelson is going afloat so soon to fight in the Baltic 'twill appear the more heartless in her. She has served our turn well with her malicious temper. Don't you go near her, my own dear love. I know your kind heart, but she's gone too far this time."

"You think I was right?" he asked wistfully. He was wholly in her hands now for good or ill.

"Right? What else could you do? What can any man do dealing with a nasty evil-thinking temper like that? If a woman can't be kind-hearted and pleasant she deserves what she gets. Many would be jealous of her, but I never was. I was as eager to make friends as if I had never a grudge against her. But she never gave you a child—how can she understand? Her love and her child were another man's not yours!"

That went home, and then there were the fond rhapsodies without which he could not now exist. And in the dear

intimate talk of all their plans and hopes there was not much room for thought of Fanny.

He hoisted his flag in the *San Josef* and prepared to leave England with an aching heart, for Emma's hour was at hand. And here he shines with the lustre that nothing earthly can dim. Every thought, love, feeling of his heart was centred in that house in Piccadilly and the event to take place there, but even that could not weigh in the scale against his country's need.

With Emma he concerted a plan of correspondence which might yet have mystified the world if she had not insanely kept his letters. There was to be a Thomson aboard his ship, a young man concerned about his wife's confinement in which Lady Hamilton's goodness of heart had led her to interest herself. She would send news to Nelson for Thomson. Nelson would forward Thomson's hopes and fears to her.

So, with this great fear at his heart, he sailed to fresh triumphs—the great victory of Copenhagen—and to what might very likely be death. He made a generous provision for Fanny and cut the bond between them, writing with cold precision:

"I have done all in my power for you, and if I died, you will find I have done the same. Therefore my only wish is to be left to myself and wishing you every happiness, believe that I am your affectionate Nelson and Bronte."

She endorsed it:

"This is my Lord Nelson's letter of dismissal which so astonished me that I immediately sent it to Mr. Maurice Nelson, who was sincerely attached to me, for his advice. He desired me not to take the least notice of it, as his brother seemed to have forgotten himself."

Yet she still waited on in hope never to be fulfilled. To Emma he wrote passionately, in almost frenzied anxiety for her health, but in their secret code.

"Pray tell Mrs. Thomson her kind friend is very uneasy about her and prays most fervently for her safety, and he says he can only depend on your goodness. May the Heavens bless and protect my dearest friend and give her every comfort this world can afford is the sincerest prayer of your faithful and affectionate Nelson and Bronte."

On the twenty-ninth of January his daughter Horatia was born, incredibly under the roof of Sir William in Piccadilly. With Mrs. Cadogan's connivance all was kept secret, though it would be difficult to guess how far Sir William himself was blinded or preferred to be. Within a week the child was at nurse in a somewhat obscure London street and in another fortnight, Emma, "recovered from one of her old Neapolitan attacks," was shining in society again—such society as accepted her.

As for Nelson; the family excitability combined with his own feelings drove him almost insane. "I believe," he wrote to Emma, "that dear Mrs. Thomson's friend will go mad with joy. He cries, prays, and performs all sorts of tricks, yet dare not show all or any of his feelings, but he has only me to consult with. He swears he will drink your health this day in a bumper, and damn me if I don't join him. I cannot write, I am so agitated by this young man at my elbow. I believe he is foolish. He does nothing but rave about you and her. I own I participate in his joy and cannot write anything."

Ah, what chance had Fanny against that new passion of fatherhood! None. If he could ever have forgotten Emma there was now this living bond between them, flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone. She must be christened

Horatia. She must be provided for, loved, guarded. Nothing was too much for this treasure, and the greater treasure to whom he owed her. It is incredible—the passion of this man for such a woman. Not sensual passion only, though that had its share, but an idealization which almost makes one doubt between the woman as he saw her and the woman she really was. And yet—only the Power to whom the secrets of all hearts are known can say which is the right estimate, the lover's or the world's.

Not even the famous letters of his great antagonist—Napoleon's to Josephine—can equal the outpourings of Nelson, held at sea by his equal devotion to England, but tortured by Emma's beauty and the fear (which it is instructive to note) of her least infidelity.

The dissolute Prince of Wales invited himself to Sir William's house to hear the enchanting Emma sing with the famous Banti, and Sir William, with an eye on the governorship of Malta, was most anxious to oblige him. Nelson was driven almost mad at the bare thought of it. A shrieking self-torture runs through every word he wrote:

"Do not sit long at table. Good God! He will be next you and telling you soft things. If he does, tell it out at table and turn him out of the house. O God, that I was dead. I am gone almost mad, but you cannot help it. His words are so charming that I am told no person can withstand them. If I had been worth ten millions I would have betted every farthing that you would not have gone into the house knowing he was there, and if you did, which I would not have believed, that you would have sent him a proper message by Sir William and sent him to hell. Hush, hush, my poor heart, keep in my breast. Emma is true. They say he sings well. I have eat nothing but a little rice and drank water. But forgive me. I know

my Emma, and don't forget you had once a Nelson, a friend, a dear friend, but alas! he has his misfortunes. He has lost the best, his only friend, his only love. Don't forget him, poor fellow. He is honest. Oh, I could thunder and strike dead with my lightning. I dreamt it last night, my Emma."

And so on through many pages—a cruel heart-piercing mixture of Lear and Ophelia and as mad as either.

"Do not let him come downstairs with you, or hand you up! Perhaps my head was a little affected. No wonder, it was such an unexpected, such a knock-down blow, such a death."

Was this happiness? Was it ever happiness? That question may well be asked but hardly answered. He trembled always on the edge of terrors of one sort or another. His own child he could but see by stealth, his "wife in the eyes of God" was the wife of another—a man bound to him by closest, most trusting ties of friendship. He was reduced to counting on that man's death and hoping for it—"When your uncle [Sir William] dies"—then all would be well. And yet not even then. There was his wife, and she in her dumb suffering must be vilified as a hard self-seeking woman that the beloved Emma might be justified, and his passion for her. And when all this failed to convince his own unhappy soul, then God must be called to justify him—God in whose eyes love is all. He must pity and understand what to human eyes must appear hideous. He threw himself on the Divine sympathy, knowing there could be none on earth for a fall so complicated.

But amid all these griefs there stood out starry clear one joy unmixed and perfect—England. He had served her as none other, and the time was not past. He could

serve her again—his frail breast her bulwark in the terrible days he foresaw—and before God and man that duty should be flawlessly done. There was his reparation, if such were needed. That should uplift his name to the snowy heights of honour and Emma's shine with it as his inspiration. He fought for her and for himself in every blow he struck for the country he loved as well as he loved her—or better.

So he sailed sorrowful, but with a great hope before him, to the north. And Frances Nelson made once more a simple dignified appeal for reconciliation; but Emma was omnipotent. It was not even answered. At all events, all hope was over when he returned from Copenhagen, for Emma, with his commission, had bought the charming house of Merton Place in Surrey which he was henceforth to share by a most extraordinary arrangement with the Hamiltons.

Emma's way was growing clear before her, and in her own mind there was now no doubt as to the future. Sir William's life could not be long. He had told her so himself and the doctors confirmed it, and the duty, fast growing irksome, of pretending to place his interests before Nelson could not trouble her much longer. She would do her utmost for him while he lasted. Her natural good-nature prompted her there and was backed by the motive of self-interest, if it needed backing, for on his will much might depend. Nelson was far from rich and the allowance he felt compelled to make his wife, sorely and openly grudged by Emma, made her the more anxious about her own resources. With two incomes at her disposal and her own bent that way, she had grown terribly extravagant. Though Merton might please Nelson and Sir William, London pleased her, and not for a moment would she hear of surrendering the house in Piccadilly and its gaieties. Both there and at Merton she was sur-

rounded by the Bohemian and masculine society which was nearly all that her reputation left her with the exception of Nelson's sisters and their families; and in such an environment all that Greville had checked in her character reappeared now and with the added force of long repression. Her easy manner was now familiarity, her outbursts of temper were almost unbearable, her very kindness affronted. She prejudiced Nelson at every turn against his wife—"Tom Tit," as she nicknamed her—and she tossed over the poor woman's wardrobe which Nelson had commissioned her (of all people!) to pack and return. She never wearied of cruel jokes about her with his sisters, who flattered her by joining in her humour. She wrote to one of them:

"Tom Tit is at Brighton. She did not come nor did he go. Jove [Nelson], for he is quite a Jove, knows better than that! It is such a pain to part with dear friends and you and I liked each other from the moment we met; our souls were congenial. Not so with Tom Tit, for *there* was an antipathy not to be described! Tom Tit does not come to town. She offered to go down but was refused, she only wanted to go to do mischief to all the great Jove's relations. 'Tis now shown, all her ill treatment and bad heart. Jove has found it out."

And the *cara amica* wrote back:

"I saw Tom Tit yesterday in her carriage at the next door come to take Lady Charlotte Drummond out with her. Had I only seen her hands spreading about I should have known her."

Yes; it was not only Emma who had so much taste and all of it so bad. With the exception of his old father most

of the Nelsons might have come under that superlative Grevillian censure so far as their treatment of Frances Nelson was concerned. Yet humanity is a mixed warp and woof, and in many ways Emma kept her kind heart. Do we ever change from our birth endowments, and as life wanes is it not a progessive dissolution into the original elements? The fine lady of Naples was rapidly degenerating into the hoyden of Up Park, only coarser, more florid, more spendthrift in money as well as emotions. But Nelson could not see it. She was his Divine Lady to the last, as she was Romney's.

Romney! She made the pilgrimage to Hampstead to see him. A sad pilgrimage. She missed the old studio in Cavendish Square. It was a villa-looking house with a neglected garden about it, a few sodden lilacs and grass-grown flower-beds, and when she entered unannounced they stared at each other for a moment in silence. He was stooped and old and dejected. A fog of melancholia clung about him, which was never to lift again. He looked at her with dull eyes as she unloosed her costly pelisse and sat down beside him and took his hands, all cordiality.

"You were once Emma," he muttered, "once Emma! My God, how beautiful you were! I shall never paint you more. No—no. It's all over."

"But, my dear sir, you remember me. You don't think me changed!" she pleaded. Indeed she knew herself she was changed. Her glass told her that if Nelson did not. Something of the young glow was gone with youth. But he only shook his head.

"You were once Emma. It's all, all over," he replied, and she could get no more than that. She left him, herself half bewildered with the passing of things. Her only remedy for care was gaiety, incessant noisy gaiety. Let their old acquaintance, Lord Minto, describe the life at Merton when Nelson returned:

"The whole establishment and way of life is such as to make one angry as well as melancholy. I do not think myself obliged to quarrel with him for his weakness, though nothing shall ever induce me to give the smallest countenance to Lady Hamilton. She looks eventually to the chance of marriage. She is in high looks, but more immense than ever. She goes on cramming Nelson with trowelfuls of flattery, which he goes on taking quietly as a child does pap. The love she makes to him is not only ridiculous but disgusting. Not only the rooms, but the whole house, staircase and all, are covered with pictures of her and him, and representations of his naval actions—an excess of vanity which counteracts its own subject. Braham, the celebrated Jew singer, performed with Lady H. She is horrid, but he entertained me."

Sir William was worn out with the riot. He took an opportunity to complain to the cool Greville on meeting him in London.

"I do assure you it is wearing me to the grave," he sighed, in reply to Greville's look of concern. "It is really but reasonable to hope for peace, having fagged all my life, but never a chance of it do I get."

"But surely, my dear Hamilton, you can point this out, you can insist!"

"With Emma? Indeed if you will recall the past you will know better. My interests are always postponed to His Lordship's. Not that I think he likes it any better than myself, but he is subservient to all her whims. Little could I foresee all this the day he first visited us in Naples! If the house were my own I might make some stand. As it is, it is not mine, and I do assure you, money flows away like water."

Greville's face was grave indeed at this admission. He had guessed it must be so, but to hear the fact was a serious matter. That ill-advised recommendation of

Emma to his uncle was coming home to him now in ways he had little dreamt of in the happy freedom of getting rid of her without cost so long ago.

"I think you should remonstrate. I do indeed. It pains me, my dear Hamilton, it pains me seriously to see you treated so unwarrantably. I am all for a remonstrance."

"Will you believe it, Greville," says Sir William, weakly querulous, "that she laid a paper from her banker Coutts on my table yesterday, intimating that Her Ladyship's balance was now twelve shillings!"

"It cannot be borne. It cannot indeed!" cries Greville, stirred into real warmth. "You must speak strongly, finally. You will be ruined, my dear Hamilton, unless you do."

"I can't speak and I won't," says Sir William. "Her temper—you knew it of old."

"Then you shall write to her. Indeed you must."

That too appeared an insuperable difficulty until Greville offered his assistance in composing a letter.

With their heads together they compounded it, Greville's mind returning by devious ways to Up Park and the misfortune of ever showing compassion to undeserving strangers, especially young women of uncertain character. It was strongly borne in upon him now.

"I by no means wish to live in solitary retreat [it ran] but to have seldom less than twelve or fourteen at table, and those varying continually, is coming back to what was become so irksome to me in Italy during the latter years. I have no complaint to make, but I feel that the whole attention of my wife is given to Lord N. and his interest at Merton. I well know the purity of Lord N.'s friendship, and I know how very uncomfortable it would make his Lordship if a separation should take place and am therefore determined to do all in my power to prevent

such an extremity" ["That will alarm her!" said Greville, pausing. "We can scarcely put that too strongly."] which [he continued] would be detrimental to all parties but would be more sensibly felt by our dear friend than by us. Provided our expenses in housekeeping do not increase beyond measure I am willing to go on upon our present footing. But I am fully determined not to have more of the very silly altercations that happen but too often between us and embitter the present moments. If really one cannot live comfortably together a wise and well-concerted separation is preferable, but I think, considering the probability of my not troubling any party long in this world, the best for us all would be to bear those ills we know of."

This also was Emma's opinion on receiving the letter and discussing it with Nelson, and a little more peace was accorded the old man now so near his end. He died in April, 1803, in the presence of Emma and Nelson, and she immediately made the sacrifice of cutting off her beautiful hair and wearing it à la Titus in the fashionable mourning style of the period draped with a huge black veil which served a few months later for the renewed Attitudes.

In so far as the black veil represented mourning there was still more occasion for it when Sir William's will was read, and her attitude then might very naturally be one of dejection. Greville had conquered. An annuity of £800 a year, to include provision for her mother, was all that was left for his "dear wife Emma." An enamel of Emma to Nelson, and Greville as residuary legatee. And eight hundred pounds a year to Emma now was less than eight hundred pence would have been in the days of Edgware Row.

CHAPTER XXVII

SUNSET

The Immortals, the lesser gods, watch their prey at leisure and, one would say, with ironic amusement. The angels may weep but it is certain they laugh.

Emma's plans were nearing fruition, and, again granting the initial error, were they so unnatural? Her husband was gone; that chapter finally closed; and every hope for the future grew nearer and more dazzling. If any untoward fate were to remove Tom Tit, she herself would succeed her and life at Merton and in London be all her heart's desire with Nelson and the little "adopted" Horatia, and, if Lady Nelson unkindly persisted in living, there was at the worst the sunny dukedom of Bronte in lovely Sicily; and there she knew it had long been Nelson's wish to retire and live in peace among his own vineyards with his Santa Emma and his Horatia. The simple kindly people there would take them unquestioning. Marie Caroline could not do less than spread a protecting wing over them and life might drift away like a dream and Nelson be blessed as he never had been blessed yet. Of course, London would be her choice, with the opera singers coming and going, and the gay old Duke of Queensberry who was so much attached to her that she had even visions of a legacy there also if the friendship continued. But after all, the old Castello of Maniace in Bronte could be filled with guests, and Italy had its pleasures and—many dimly agreeable things ran through her brain in those days of freedom. She was really not pinched for money at the moment. Nelson allowed her £100 a month for the housekeeping at Merton, and with that and Sir

William's annuity she might have managed well but for—a large but—her own incorrigible extravagance and incapacity for saying no either to herself or to any one else. How could she do without a little house in London?—and there was a charming one in a charming neighbourhood, Clarges Street, out of Piccadilly. She must have that. And the expenses would be smaller at Merton because the French were at their old game and Nelson was again ordered to sea—to the Mediterranean, to Naples, where he would see her adored Marie Caroline and remind her of her Emma; for indeed it appeared as if that ungrateful Majesty were forgetting her steadily but surely. Possibly the Queen felt that her friend's services had been well paid with £30,000 worth of diamonds and other Royal gifts and such Royal condescensions as fall to the lot of few blacksmiths' daughters.

Yes, it all promised exceedingly well, and Emma found her widow's cap, if so the black veil could be described, "le vrai bonnet de la liberté."

Greville was troublesome certainly. He was cold and sharp. He no longer cared to hide his dislike and he hurried her out of the Piccadilly house in a way which any self-respecting widow would resent. Still, she remembered the past with a certain tenderness, and he had had his uses. The "little Emma," now a young woman, had been edged off to a situation abroad without any certain knowledge as to her parentage, and was heard of no more. He might be useful also in her endless petitions to the Government for a pension as a reward for her own services in the matter of victualling the British Fleet before the Battle of the Nile. But that unfortunately fell flat. There was a prejudice against her in high places which she could never understand. Against Nelson also, though he was the darling of the people—who had alas! no pensions to bestow. But he would win fresh honours, prize money,

rewards, in this commission and then all would be well.

His love letters were always as passionate as the first he had ever written her. He would scarcely allow himself any recreation ashore in the lovely Mediterranean lands lest she should be jealous of the dark-eyed signoras. She had no anxieties there. Indeed, she might enjoy herself in perfect security in London with old Q. (as they called him) and his revellers, and Emma was the first and gayest of them all. She had her admirers, and Nelson wrote, with a jest which stings a little:

"Never mind the great Bashaw at the Priory. He be damned! If he was single and had a mind to marry you he could only make you a Marchioness but, as he is situated and I situated, I can make you a Duchess, and, if it pleases God, that time may arrive—Amen, Amen!"

An odd invocation, but cheering to Emma.

In the January of that year Nelson's second daughter was born—another "little Emma," for, all unknowing of the first, that name commended itself to him. Her life, however, was brief, and the charming mother resumed her gaieties untrammelled. With this, and the threatening of blindness, he had enough to trouble him on his apparently hopeless quest of the French Fleet, and never was his triumphant greatness in public affairs better shown than in that long and dogged patience. He never went ashore from June, 1803, until July, 1805. All his thoughts were concentrated on Emma and on the French Fleet, and in truth they meant the same thing for without the conquest of the one he could not hope to see the other, so firmly were the country's eyes fixed on him. It is a relief to turn from that hectic life of Emma's, with its noisy assumption and petty cruelties to the deserted wife, to the pure austerity of his life on the high seas.

Gradually, the man was escaping from her clutch, resolving, as a cloud does in approaching the sun, into pure glory. There is a clear wind blowing now, the wind of the great oceans and the noble deeds of men. Who can read the account of that long passionate hope-deferred chase without a pang of sympathy? Let us turn to it.

I who write have heard the tale of it as a child from an old, old man of my own blood, who was serving as a young midshipman in the gallant Captain Parker's *Amazon*—Parker, a nephew of the great Lord St. Vincent, Nelson's teacher and friend. Who could forget that gallant story who has heard it from the lips of one who shared it all? Nelson, misled by a false report that Villeneuve, the French Admiral, was about to attack the West Indies, made what speed he might for the Gulf of Para. Ten sail of the line pursuing eighteen. At Barbados he was reinforced by two line of battleships, and thence made what speed he could for Trinidad.

Reaching the Gulf of Para, he summoned his captains on board the *Victory*, and my relative accompanied Captain Parker as midshipman of his boat, carrying some official papers with them with which he followed him to the poop. The officers gathered about Nelson, and pointing in the direction of the island, he said:

"The French Fleet is probably there. They have eighteen sail of the line. The *Victory* will take three. *Canopus*, *Spartiate* and *Belleisle* will take two each, and the rest of you, one apiece. Now, gentlemen, the fleets are equal."

Yet this was no foolhardiness in spite of its gallantry, for, ship for ship, Nelson's fleet was more equal to Villeneuve's than the one which he commanded at the Nile had been to that of Bruey's. There was the flash in Nelson,

but there was also the thunder to back it. That must never be forgotten.

And later, off Toulon, came the same Parker's famous dash for Lisbon in the *Amazon*, under Nelson's orders to avoid Sir John Orde, the Admiral, who, according to the Nelsonic notion, was robbing him of his frigates and too jealously guarding the bounds of his own station to the west. Parker was to avoid his ships like the devil!

"And if it comes to a court martial," says Nelson with humour in his face, "you shall not be broke though Sir John Orde is my senior officer. I will stand by you. Take your orders and good-bye. And remember, Parker, if you can't weather that fellow, I shall think you have not a drop of your old uncle's blood in your veins!"

Off and away went Parker burning with zeal, and as he passed Spartel, lo and behold Sir John Orde's squadron taking it easy in the moonlight! Parker might have slipped past, but, alas, an outlying frigate, lynx-eyed, commanded by "little good Captain Hoste," who had borne Nelson's despatches to Naples after the Battle of the Nile, caught sight of the *Amazon* lying low and gave chase and had the heels of her. Aboard came Hoste, brimming with Orde's jealous orders that no ship should proceed to the westward. Parker buttonholed him in his cabin.

"Captain Hoste, I believe you owe all your advance ment in the service to my uncle Lord St. Vincent and to Lord Nelson. I am avoiding Sir John Orde's squadron by desire of Lord Nelson. I must go on."

Hoste stood dumb and doubting. Parker, being his senior, he could not delay him on his own authority, and with Nelson behind him—! Parker saw the doubt and continued: "After all, would it not be better if you were

not to meet the *Amazon* to-night, Captain Hoste?" Silence. Hoste went quietly over the side and back to his own ship in the moonlight. He had not met the *Amazon*. Mahan tells this story finely, but it is something to have heard of the Villeneuve chase from a man who took part in it.

It would be a gallant tale to write the incidents of that long cruise with its seemingly unsuccessful ending. Yet not unsuccessful, for it prepared and paved the way for the struggle of giants to follow, and the English people knew it and hailed him as the conqueror he was when he returned for his brief three weeks' respite to England before the last and greatest struggle of Trafalgar.

Portsmouth, London, surged about him. What did Lady Hamilton or anything matter where their hero, their darling, was concerned?

"I met Nelson in a mob at Piccadilly!" said Minto, "and got hold of his arm, so that I was mobbed too. It is really quite affecting to see the wonder and admiration and love and respect of the whole world. It is beyond anything represented in a play or in a poem of fame."

Beyond everything. The instinct was true, was right. Because he had not the evil skill to hide that one fall in his great life as a wickeder man would have done with easy hypocrisy, was he—their Nelson—to be scorned? God forbid, they thought and said. But, oh—but, oh, that it had been for a worthier woman! The inadequacy of the divinity to the sacrifice is what breaks the heart in this story. Yet be she what she might, one is glad to remember that those three weeks at Merton were happy. His old father had gone to his reward, but the rest of the family clustered about him, his little Horatia there and Emma radiating sunshine. Even Minto, who could not abide her, owns that. "She is a clever being after all; the passion is as hot as ever." Yes, and a driving force

that neither Minto nor any other could estimate—a passion to be justified before earth and Heaven.

He knew that any moment might part them—he savoured every instant as its sweetness touched his lips. And yet, almost before it seemed possible, the call came. Could he, the beloved and trusted of the whole nation, hesitate, when it was known that the French Fleet had been seen off Cadiz? Not he. Emma was swooning and weeping all over the dinner table, according to Minto. Nelson's passion was burning in a clear white flame that admitted of no outward expression of emotion. His farewell to her no human eye saw, but by the little Horatia's bed he knelt and prayed while she slept. She it was who sanctified that bond to him—God's blessing made visible in a little child.

Death was approaching and he knew it, and in the solemn twilight of that great presence all his feelings took on a majesty far removed from the tumult of days not long gone by. He wrote in his intimate journal:

"At 10.30 drove from dear, dear Merton where I left all which I hold dear in this world to go and serve my King and country. May the great God whom I adore enable me to fulfil the expectations of my country; and if it is His good pleasure that I should return, my thanks will never cease being offered up to the Throne of His Mercy. If it is His good Providence to cut short my days upon earth, I bow with the greatest submission, relying that He will protect those so dear to me that I may leave behind. His will be done." He closed with a triple Amen.

So Emma, leaning from the window, choked with sobs, saw the night enfold him in its darkness. He was but forty-seven—so much before him yet! So much to hope and to do. In that moment surely nothing was left of her

but what was purely womanly, though her easy tears dried soon.

He joined the *Victory* elate but calm. The Admiralty, realizing the battle of the giants to be, had invited him to name his own officers. What! And cast a slur on those he might not choose? That would not be Nelson? He replied:

"Choose yourselves, my Lords. The same spirit actuates the whole profession. You cannot choose wrong." Nor could they. He and the nation alike owned it. The Fleet owned it. They knew who led them, and when the signal flew from masthead to masthead from the watchful inshore frigates to Nelson fifty miles at sea off Spartel, "The enemy are coming out of port," there was not a heart but beat steadily with a calm confidence in the man set over them not only by the Admiralty but by the Almighty.

Once more and for the last time Nelson confronted Napoleon in the person of his combined fleets of France and Spain.

The story of Trafalgar is not one for the pen of a romancer, for the more simply the stern and glorious truth is told, the more it raises the human imagination to its own great heights. Yet certain pictures arise and wring the soul with their humanity. And these may be spoken of, for the feet of the true Romance tread near indeed to God.

Nelson, writing the famous codicil to his will in which he committed Emma and his child as a sacred trust to the nation, causing its attestation by the signatures of his two old friends Blackwood and Hardy, and setting beneath this the solemn sentence, "In sight of the combined fleets of France and Spain, distant about ten miles."

Nelson watching the removal of the bulkheads of his cabin for action and, as they displaced her pic-

ture, bidding them: "Take care of my guardian angel."

An officer, hastening to speak to him with a petition for a post of danger and glory, but halting, seeing the Admiral on his knees in the dismantled cabin, writing—his last words, his last prayer—and withdrawing in a reverence that would not break his solemn communion.

"May the great God whom I worship grant to my country and for the benefit of Europe in general a great and glorious victory and may no misconduct in any one tarnish it, and may humanity after victory be the predominant feature in the British Fleet. For myself individually I commit my life to Him who made me, and may His blessing light on my endeavours for serving my country faithfully. To Him I resign myself and the just cause which is entrusted to me to defend."

And again the triple Amen. And so he went on deck.

The glorious signal of England's certain expectation from her sons, the stately advance of the fleets into action, Collingwood's *Royal Sovereign* leading, as all the ships of the three nations to be engaged chivalrously and by one impulse hoisted their flags in haughty and dignified salute. What a sight to linger forever in the world's memory!

Then Nelson flew the signal for close action and turned to Blackwood—"Now I can do no more. We must trust to the great Disposer of Events." Blackwood, returning to his ship, took his hand. "God bless you, Blackwood," he said, "I shall never speak to you again." And even as Blackwood left the *Victory* the first shot tore through her maintopgallant sail, and the battle was begun.

These are the pictures that rise amid the hell of flame and smoke. So, in great moments when the littleness of the vanishing world is apparent, men fling themselves on the Unseen, the Mighty, surrounding us as the unplumbed sea girdles the earth. And through these, at last, when

he lay, wounded to death, Nelson attained to look upon the beginnings of peace.

War thundered about him—"Oh, Victory, Victory, how you distract my poor brain"—and yet, through the roar of the guns, a stealing quiet can be discerned.

It was Victory in another sense also—triumph that he must carry with him for he could not live to taste it. Hardy, now in command, hurrying from the bloody deck, gave him the glad news of victory almost beyond hope, eventual ruin to Napoleon and safety to England. He heard it and rejoiced; then, gasping:

"Take care of my dear Lady Hamilton, Hardy. Take care of poor Lady Hamilton."

And then, in the strange loneliness of death, like a child, the great Admiral said: "Kiss me, Hardy"—the last token of human love, vanishing, vanishing in the Eternal. And Hardy stooped and kissed him and once more took his station on deck, never again to meet his friend in life.

He was sinking rapidly now. To the chaplain: "I have *not* been a *great* sinner—" and after a short pause, "*Remember.* I leave Lady Hamilton and my daughter as a legacy to my country. Never forget Horatia."

Nearer, nearer, came the end, and at last even those beloved names faded and passed from the mirror of his mind and were gone, and only the two which were one remained, and the man, bending above him to lose nothing, heard only "God and my Country," as he passed away into the inmost of his country's love and remembrance, and higher—higher.

After that scene and when the threads must be gathered up, it is surely impossible to write anything condemnatory or slighting of the beautiful woman whom such a man had loved. With him her romance ended, and she became a tragic triviality. Let others follow her sinking star through all its sorrowful clouding—I cannot.

For Nelson, Trafalgar was the crowning mercy, the glorious reward of a life of self-devotion scarcely to be paralleled. Had he lived, it is said that blindness must have been his fate, and perhaps a yet more cruel clear-sightedness where he might well have prayed to be blind forever, for she had been tested by her attitude to his wife and had failed—a tragic failure that must have marred all their future. But he died with his faith unbroken.

Surely his great belief uplifts her and, washing all the stains away, leaves her fair face pure beauty in our memory, as Romney, who also loved her, has given it to us forever. To whom little is given, of them shall little be required, and she had little enough in her young days when character is unalterably moulded for life.

As for judgment on him—Heaven forbid! The cruelty to his wife is patent, but not the circumstances which led up to it. Nor her compensations. It was not all loss. If she had ever envied Emma her great husband's love, Emma had cause to envy her also.

When the day of their final separation came, this was Nelson's last farewell to his wife: "I call God to witness there is nothing in you or your conduct I wish otherwise." Let that be set against the bitternesses with which the other influence inspired his generous heart.

I stood by her tomb in Littleham Churchyard, Devon, not many years ago and read its proud legend: "Frances, Viscountess Nelson, Duchess of Bronte." So she bore his name unsullied to the grave. She lived her days in peace in the family of her son, tenderly cared for by those who loved her. Here is her portrait by one who knew her well: "If mildness, forbearance and indulgence to the weaknesses of human nature could have availed her, her fate might have been very different. No reproach ever passed her lips. You should know the worth of her

who has been so often misrepresented from the wish of many to cast the blame anywhere but on him who was so deservedly dear to the nation."

Deservedly dear indeed, and most dear to her also. Many waters cannot quench love. Her grandchild remembered and recorded how she would take her husband's miniature from a preciously treasured casket and kiss it and lay it back, and how in her low voice she would say: "You too, little Fan, may one day know what it is to have a broken heart," with the gentle sweetness of nature that lived in the child's memory. This lady, too, had had her battle and had conquered.

What room is there for judgment? These things are beyond us. There was gold in Emma also, with all her evil. Her devotion to her poor lowly-born old mother, unfaltering in riches and poverty, is a flower that time cannot wither, and there was the quick passion for courage and high deeds, and the generous hand in giving. England owes her a debt for the beacon fire of sympathy which lit Nelson's way across stormy seas—a debt she never paid, but should not forget. There is a sullied splendour about the woman which makes her rememberable where women greater and better are forgotten, a warm humanity, which pleads for her eternally and must until Nelson's own name is drifted over with the remorseless sands of time.

If it is possible to imagine some world where love in pure essence seeking its source immortal is one, it may be believed that the love of these two women, so strangely different in character and circumstances, may, at last united, heal his wounds and draw him forever to the heart of the Beautiful made manifest in each of them. For Love is eternal, and who shall judge his way in the deep waters?

THE END